

UNIVERSITY OF TURKU

Silk and ink

What were silk wallets, and what can they, together with Jacobina Charlotta Munterhjelm's diary, tell us about the gentry women's lives in the 18th and 19th century?

School of History, Culture and Arts Studies

European Heritage, Digital Media and the Information Society

Master's Thesis

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UNIVERSITY OF TURKU
Faculty of Humanities
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VIRTANEN, ANU: *Silk and ink*

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Master Thesis, 88 pages.

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The subject of this thesis is the elaborate silk wallets and what can they tell about the gentry women's lives in the 18th and 19th century Finland together Jacobina Charlotta Munsterhjelm's diary. Silk wallets were made of silk and decorated by embroidering, they were used to preserve memorabilia and letters. Making these lavish items took time, skills and materials, and the decorations usually contained symbols and messages. As main source there are silk wallets from the collections of the National Museum of Finland and Satakunta Museum, as well as the diary of Jacobina Munsterhjelm from 1799 to 1801. By interpreting these items we can build a picture of gentry women's lives. The culture of silk wallets is European, the silk wallet phenomenon studied is Swedish-Finnish, and the research is limited mainly in Finland by its sources. This research has been carried out by constructing a cultural context to the silk wallets with the help of Ginzburg's methods from his work *Juusto ja madot - 1500-luvun myllärin maailmankuva*. Silk wallets represent the gentry as well as the communication culture in the 18th and 19th centuries, but have remained unstudied.

The thesis consists of two parts, the first focuses on the silk wallets, from where were they developed, how they were made, and to their decorations. The silk wallet culture developed among the gentry handicrafts during the 18th century and faded during the early 20th century. The making of the silk wallets demanded time, skills and materials. The decorations contain messages and symbols – they contain the possible affections the makers might have toward the receiver, and reflect the status and qualities of the receiver. The second part examines the makers, the gentry women, and the handicraft culture which played a big role in their lives, through silk wallets and the diary of Jacobina Munsterhjelm. From there it continues to the affections and meanings which can be found from the silk wallets.

Keywords: Silk wallet, diaries, gentry, gentry women, Finland, 18th century, 19th century, handworks, embroidery, everyday life, gender history, personal history,

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Tutkielman aiheena ovat silkkilompakoiden maailma ja mitä voimme kertoa säätyläisenä naisen elämästä 1700- ja 1800-luvun Suomessa silkkilompakoiden sekä Jacobina Munsterhjelmän päiväkirjan kautta. Silkkilompakot olivat silkistä tehtyjä, eritavoin kirjottuja esineitä, joita käytettiin useimmiten säilyttämään muistoja ja kirjeitä. Niiden tekeminen on vaatinut aikaa, taitoja sekä materiaaleja, ja niiden koristelut sisältävät erilaisia viestejä ja symboleja. Tutkielman lähteinä on käytetty Suomen kansallismuseon ja Satakunnan Museon kokoelmissa olevia silkkilompakoita, sekä Jacobina Charlotta Munsterhjelmän päiväkirjaa vuosilta 1799-1801, jotka yhdessä valottavat säätyläisnaisen elämää. Silkkilompakko kulttuuri on Euroopan laajuinen, mutta tutkittu silkkilompakkoilmiö sijoittuu Suomi-Ruotsi alueelle. Aineiston perusteella tutkimusalue rajautuu pääosin Suomeen. Tutkimus on toteutettu rakentamalla esineille niiden kulttuurinen konteksti käyttäen apuna Ginzburgin johtolanka metodia teoksesta *Juusto ja madot – 1500-luvun myllärin maailmankuva*. Silkkilompakot edustavat oman aikansa kulttuuria ja ihmisten välisiä suhteita, mutta tutkimusaiheina ne ovat jääneet vähälle.

Tutkielma jakautuu kahteen käsittelylukuun, ensimmäinen keskittyy silkkilompakoihin, niiden kehitykseen, valmistukseen sekä koristeluun. Silkkilompakot kehittyivät säätyläisten keskuudessa 1700-luvulla ja ne katosivat 1900-luvulle tultaessa. Niiden tekeminen on vaatinut aikaa, taitoja sekä materiaaleja, ja niiden koristelut sisältävät erilaisia viestejä ja symboleja. Koristelut sisälsivät vihjeitä tekijänsä mahdollisista tunteista saajaa kohtaan sekä kuvastivat vastaanottajan asemaa ja piirteitä. Toinen osio tarkastelee lähemmin säätyläisnaisen elämää ja siinä suuressa roolissa ollutta käsityökulttuuria silkkilompakoiden ja Jacobinan päiväkirjan kautta, josta jatketaan tunteisiin ja merkityksiin, joita tekijät kirjoivat silkkilompakoiden koristeisiin.

Asiasanat: Silkkilompakot, päiväkirjat, säätyläiset, porvaristo, säätyläisnainen, 1700-luku, 1800-luku, Suomi, arkielämä, naishistoria, henkilöhistoria

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1. Introduction

1.1. The subject and background

I came across these beautiful objects as I was doing my bachelor thesis about the cultural context of wallet purses and silk wallets in the 18th and 19th centuries. These items enchanted me with their unique shapes and delicate decorations. As I was looking for information about these objects, I found out that there is not much information about them. I found little crumbs of information from here and there, from item cards¹ of museum collections, literature and from diaries, but no conclusive information about the wallets. This made me want to know more. What were these items? How were they created and by whom? Why were they made? As they are decorative and made with care, they must have had some meaning to the makers, as well as to the person receiving them. And what about the decoration, what kind of meaning does it have? From there I started to wonder, what can they tell us about the time they were made, the lives of the gentry?

Silk wallets are handmade, decorated items that usually have two inside pockets. They are folded in half, but in some cases there can more than two folding and pockets. The main material in silk wallets is silk. In some cases the base material can be something else, for example cotton, can be used as the inside pocket material. The wallets have some kind of decoration on the cover and on the inside usually, a floral decoration. Silk wallets can also be referred to as silk letter case or pocket book in English, taskbok or plånböcker av siden in Swedish and silkilompakko in Finnish. In my work I will use the name silk wallet to mean all of these items that have similar look and were used similarly. At first, silk wallets seemed like a small part of the culture and lives of the gentry, but after taking a closer look I found out that these objects were more common and versatile than what I had expected. Young girls and women would make them as handwork at home and in pensions². They were given as presents, and the decoration often had some symbolic meaning. What kinds of decorations were used in these items? What kind of equipment did the girls have to make these items? What was the importance of these items in young gentry women's lives. What can these decorations tell us? What hopes and dreams these silk wallets held in them? These

¹ A paper card or a part of a computer program, which contains the basic information of the item, the possible donation information, the measurements, a description of the item, as well as possible context information of the item (the owner, timing, maker, usage, etc.)

² Pensions were similar to boarding houses, where young gentry girls would live through the school year. In these schools girls would learn reading, writing, dancing, manners as well as different skills in hand work.

questions are a part of the reason why I got interested in these items. The subject of this thesis is the silk wallets made in the 18th and 19th century, and what they can tell us about the lives of the makers, the young gentry women. By gentry women I mean young girls and women who were members of the noble and the bourgeoisie class. This is because in some cases it is difficult to define the social class of the person mentioned in the documents. In Finland the noble class was not very large. Despite of this, there are plenty different objects and archive materials that have remained to this day.

Museums and archives are filled with items and documents that have remained from the past. Some item groups are more represented than others, and in some cases the items from the wealthier class have survived more often as they would have been less used than in the poor classes. Most of the textiles made and used in the past have been worn-out in use. The combining factor in the textiles preserved in museums is the powerful sentimental value that usually relates either to the makers themselves, to the period when they were made, or to the receiver. The remained textiles can be considered as an exception; they are often unusual, made and designed quite skillfully.³ These textiles are made with consideration and affection and the user has preserved these meaningful items. One of these meaningful items is the sampler, square linen on which girls would start from early age to practice different embroidery decorations. Bo Lönnqvist has timed that the samplers became popular in the late 18th century and the beginning of the 19th century as the heyday for the samplers. At this point you could find the samplers from peasant houses, whereas before they were a typical bourgeoisie phenomenon typical in mansions, vicarages and merchant houses.⁴ These items were the sample of a girl's craft, and they would embroider the alphabets, usually in two different fonts, and numbers as well as various other motifs, for example animals and flowers on the linen. The motifs were many times copied from the family's old samplers but also new motifs were invented. The family connections and the importance of the family ties were manifested in the monograms⁵.⁶ After the sampler was done, the maker would sew her name or initials and the finishing date on the sampler. In his article *Merkkausliina sukutauluna* Lönnqvist also draws attention to the other functions of the samplers that seems to have developed in the late 18th century. The decoration changes

³ Lampinen 1985, 4-5.

⁴ Lönnqvist, 11

⁵ A monogram is a motif made by overlapping or combining two or more letter for one symbol, they are often made by combining the initials of an individual or a couple.

⁶ Vainio-Korhonen 2009, 166

from patterns to monograms. Numerous initials can be found on the sampler and you can see certain pattern in them.

These samplers are important as on them you can see which patterns and monograms were important for the girl and her family. They combine together the popular models of the time and the initials of the maker's family. Similar decorations and patterns can also be found in the silk wallets. They are a part of clothing and fashion as well as everyday handicraft, and a way to represent oneself and to be a part of the social environment. These wallets were filled with meanings from the moment they were made, owned or given to someone, and also as they were seen. These wallets are a direct path of the life of the gentry, and, more specifically, the gentry women. And it is these I want to study.

1.2. Material and methodology

The primary material of this thesis consists of two sources; the actual silk wallets made by the gentry women, preserved in museums, and the diary of Jacobina Charlotta Munsterhjelm. By interpreting these sources it is possible to make the past more understandable and explain the cultural context. As examining items made in the past to be given for someone, we can learn more about the past. These silk wallets were made for someone, not to tell a story for a researcher few hundred years later. As Carlo Ginzburg points out in the preface of his work *Juusto ja madot, 1500-luvun myllärin maailmankuva*, ordinary people can be representative as there is nothing special in him or her ⁷. The same idea can be found in this thesis, the makers were ordinary people, and these items, the silk wallets and the diary, are ordinary articles of the very day life, and from there, they can tell us from the everyday life of the gentry women. The materials have given the themes in this thesis, what can be found from the silk wallets and from the diary, which elements come to prominence as I ask my questions

The silk wallets, used as the primary material in this thesis, are from the National Museum of Finland and the Satakunta Museum's archives. I chose The National Museum collection as it contains material from all over Finland, and Satakunta Museum's collection, as I am already familiar with the silk wallets in the museum's collection and they are one of the reasons why I am doing this research. All together I have familiarized myself with 100 silk wallets. The items in the museum collections does not consist only the object, the information of the item is preserved on an item

⁷ Ginzburg 2007, 35

card, that has the description of the object, the donation information and the possible context information; the owner, usage and location. In many cases, there is no context information of the object, only the time and place of the donation and the donator, but the information of who has made the object, why it was made and how it was used is rarely found. Sometimes the maker's estate, or name, is mentioned in the context information, but no other information is found. This is a challenge when using these items in a study and in trying to understand the context of a certain item group. To understand the silk wallets context better, I have interviewed textile conservator Hannele Suominen from Satakunta Museum. In her profession, she has combined the item cards. She was able to provide a depiction of the history of the costumes and the gentry life in the 18th and the 19th centuries.

The archive material, for example the diary of Jacobina Charlotta Munsterhjelm from 1799 to 1801, tells us what happened in the daily life of a gentry family in eastern Nyland. In her diary Jacobina writes about the surrounding life, the daily visits of the neighbours and relatives, and about festivities and happenings in the society. The interesting thing is that she talks so little about herself, about how she feels or thinks about the events happening around her though she explains what she has done during the days, sometimes in detail. With this kind of information of what happened in the everyday life of the gentry one can answer questions about a life of a young gentry woman. What kind of handcraft was part of her daily life and what kind of needlework did she do? From what did the everyday life of a mansion consisted about? It helps us to build a cultural context to the silk wallets. I will use a version of the diary that Bo Lönnqvist has edited. He has kept the appearance of the diary notes similar to the original diary making only a few notes himself if a word or a sentence has been unreadable or destroyed. Another reason is also that the diary is very old and in poor shape and therefore by using this version I will not consume or destroy the original diary more.

With this kind of material it is important to remember that diaries do not always tell the whole truth. Jacobina wrote her diary at the change of the 18th and 19th century and in the manner of that time. We also have to remember that for her some events have been unworthy of mentioning and Jacobina necessarily has not written the whole truth of what has happened. She may have possibly censored her text. In some parts of her diary there are parts of a page missing, some words or parts of the text is crossed out and re-written. This raises some questions. Why has Jacobina censored her text? Her writing has plenty of spelling mistakes, so why would she have crossed out some of the

mistakes, but left others unnoticed? Or did she write something that she did not want someone else to read? Or could it have been that someone else has taken her journal and taken out some parts? These are also important questions we have to keep in mind when interpreting her diary and the silk wallets. The makers may have wanted to create something more decorative than what they were able to create, or maybe the maker's embroidered patterns that were more important to someone else than them. What did the maker want to tell by her handwork? What was included and what was left out?

1.3. Interpretative orientation

Sometimes the lack of basic information, as well as the context or the background information, makes it difficult to interpret these items. In this case it is important to have a good understanding of the era one is studying. Items do not always tell much, but with their help we can ask questions about their surrounding culture. Objects are products of culture and traditions, and clothing is a representation of the past, and they tell us about the surrounding culture, the society, the mental life and about the values that the people had. Like Daniel Roche says in his work *A history of Everyday things, the Birth of Consumption in France 1600-1800*

*“Clothing, more than any other element in material culture, embodies the values of the society’s mental image and the standards of reality as it is experienced. It is the obligatory battlefield for the confrontation between change and tradition.”*⁸

Fernand Braudel⁹ has a similar vision in his work *The Structures of everyday life, The Limits of Possible*. He offers these attributes to fashion, that it is rather an indicator of a deeper phenomena – of the energies, possibilities, and demands of a given society, economy and civilization than just a trifling thing ¹⁰. These thoughts can be combined together, or considered as a different point of views of the same idea. And I think they define well the idea behind this thesis. These silk wallets are mirrors to the lives of the gentry women. The one thing that I, and many historians, could criticize Braudel of, that in his book he talks about fashion like it affected only a small group of

⁸ Roche 2000, 197

⁹ Fernand Braudel (1902 – 1985), a French historian and a leader of the Annales School. He had an enormous influence on historical writing in France and other countries.

¹⁰ Braudel 1981, 323

people.¹¹ However, in my opinion, fashion was a part of everyone's life one way or the other. It affected people's clothing, designs used and materials used to make clothes. In Braudel's defence, his point of view is understandable considering that he handles a long period of time in a few pages, he is more focused on the big changes on the society level than on the individual level, and that he seems to be more interested about the 16th century's history than 18th and 19th centuries. Still, this is a factor that has to be taken in to consideration when reading his work.

In my thesis, there have been two studies which have been more than helpful on my quest on understanding the cultural context of silk wallets. The first is *Börsar och plånböcker av siden*, written by Eva Wiséhn. Men have invented money and they have created the ways to use it. But as Wiséhn says, it is typical that a woman became to make a form in which they could store money¹². In her work she studies the history of silk and the ways of handling it, and from there she continues to the purses and wallets, more precisely silk purses and wallets, their history and development, and continues to present some of the Kungliga Myntkabinettets silk wallets. The other study which deserves to be paid attention is Marja-Liisa Lehto's article *Käsitöitä 1700- ja 1800-luvulta* in the exhibition publication *Ruusunkukkia ja villasukkia*, in which she covers the handwork culture from those two centuries. Lehto manages to describe the lives of women during that era as well as the changes in handwork by using handmade examples of silk wallets and bags, a baby's coatee, and through stories of skilful women.

In Finnish gender studies Kirsi Vainio-Korhonen has to be taken in account. She is a professor of Finnish history in the Turku University and she has researched the women's history from different point of views. She has studied women's lives and stories from a simple maid to self-sufficient handworkers as well as the gentrywomen. In her research *Käsin Tehty - Miehelle Ammatti, Naiselle ansioiden lähde*, she studies the women working in the field of handcraft, and how it differentiated from a man's experiences. Men had an opportunity to work in one trade, as women usually had to learn several skills. Woman's education in handcraft was many times occasional and unplanned where as the man's education usually offered a perspective that would affect his whole future.¹³ In *Suomen Herttuattaren arvoitus*, Vainio-Korhonen takes the reader to an interesting journey to the 18th century Finland and Europe along with single

¹¹ Braudel 1981, 135.

¹² Wiséhn 2006, 9

¹³ Vainio-Korhonen 1998, 185.

ladies, wives and widows as well as young gentry girls. In her books she shows that the history is not always about the actions of great men and the consequences of wars, but also the lives and actions of women and children, the everyday life and the feelings of the people and the society. History is a consequence of the choices we make.

A costume is also a result of choices and it is affected by the users social surroundings. World is in constant change, and the world of fashion has been in constant change throughout the history. In making these objects and giving those to others the girls have made a series of choices and we can follow these. The danger in this kind of work is historical anachronism that I might put something in the history that isn't there, ideas, thought or meanings.

1.4. The research question and concepts

Objects tell us about the time they were made, when they were used and of the world surrounding them. By examining these objects we obtain information of what was important to people, by analyzing on what is there and what is not. What has been left out and what has preserved in the object. Interpreting the past using small clues, in this work the silk wallets and a diary, we can understand what it was like to live as a young gentry girl in 18th and 19th century Finland. What was important in their lives? And how the different sewing and needlework were part of their lives? The main questions of my thesis are what was a silk wallet and what do they tell about the lives of the gentry girls in the 18th and 19th century? Can they tell us about the makers and the receivers' mutual relations? What did the maker want to say by making these items?

The primary material consists of the actual silk wallets made by the gentry girls which I will examine closer in the second chapter. How were they preserved at the time? Why were they made and how were they used? I will also examine the making and decorating of silk wallet; the embroidery techniques and the materials from the 18th and 19th centuries, as well as the motifs used. The third chapter focuses on the makers of these objects, the young gentry women; who were they? What can these handmade objects tell about their lives? What can the silk wallets reveal of their hopes and dreams? What were the personal relations of the people associated with the silk wallets and the possible situations in where these silk wallets were used? I will progress from the object itself to the maker, from the small detail to the surrounding context.

Silk wallets were part of the world of accessories, decorative items that supplement one's garment. Accessories can be for example jewelry, gloves, handbags, hats, belts, scarves, muffs, tulle shawls, fans and masks. They are separate from the

actual costume. In fashion's point of view, accessories can add style and class to an outfit. They can also have practical functions, or they can have of religious meanings. Sometimes accessories can be used purely for cultural or aesthetic reasons. Silk wallets seem to be a part of this latter group. They have definitely had a cultural and social meaning. They were not made only because they were beautiful and because the young girl needed to rehearse her skills in handwork, but because they had some meaning, they were a way to communicate.

Living in the 18th century was harsh and regulated by strict rules. People were expected to behave according to their rank as well as notice the other people's rank and estate. This could also be seen in the clothing, as only the gentry were allowed to dress in fashionable way when the common people wore traditional clothes. Fashion spread with the Swedish gentry who came to Finland to work; as Stockholm was an important trading place and fashion centre, many of the costumes and accessories would spread to Finland. During the 18th century in Sweden and Finland mercantilism¹⁴ also affected dressing by regulations that contained detailed information about the decorations and cutting.¹⁵ The cities were the cultural centres and together with some populated communities, for example Elimäki, where Munsterhjelm family lived, were the centre places for the gentry as the gentry would gather together for different social events even from great distances.¹⁶

The life of a young gentry girl was filled with different activities of which the most important was to teach them how to become a good wife. Typical day in a mansion consisted of reading, embroidering, music-making and card playing¹⁷ as well as learning etiquette, writing and other handiwork. There were also visits from friends and family that brought joy the daily life. The most important goal in a young girl's life was to get married and to become a good wife and a mother. The knowledge in craft used to be self-evident for all women in all classes. Certain skills were required from all women regardless of their age, social class and skillfulness. A large group of women, especially unmarried women and widows, were able to earn their living with their handicraft skills. In the 18th century they would sew linen, work as milliners embroidering fashionable silk caps, and at the end of the century they were able to work as dress seamstresses. Handicraft was also an essential part of a gentry girls education.

¹⁴ An economic doctrine where the government controlled the foreign trade as the export had to exceed the imports.

¹⁵ Pylkkänen 1982, 22-26

¹⁶ Pylkkänen 1982, 22-23

¹⁷ Wisehn 2006, 29

In the wealthy families they were able to hire a governess or send the girl to a pension to learn the necessary skills, where active ladies would give lessons in various handwork skills, for example sewing, embroidering, making headdresses, lace making, flower and basket making, darning as well as reading, drawing and dancing. These girls were usually from seven to twelve years old. School days were from five to six hours long and they included reading the catechism as well as the ABC-book, calculus, writing, a little bit of geography and history and plenty of handwork. Few of these ladies would also offer a place to stay and food for the students outside the city. The dominant education given in the family and boarding schools for girls became to its end in the 19th century. Knowledge of mere ABC and catechism no longer gave necessary knowledge for adult life. In the autonomous Finland it was no longer enough, that only the boys who were part of the higher classes would be educated in occupations. The first public school for girls opened in 1834, and both Finnish and Swedish speaking girls were taken in, especially girls from poor families who did not have a possibility to hire a governess or pay for boarding school. The operations of the schools ended in 1872, after which the daughters of the working class were allowed to educate themselves in elementary school.¹⁸

¹⁸ Vainio-Korhonen 2010, 83-84, 89

2. The art and craft of making a silk wallet

2.1. Silk wallet

There has always been various means of payment and items worth of trading, for example furs, metal coins and pieces cut out of sheets of copper. Different kinds of metals quickly became an important form of paying, coins in various shapes and value changed hands quite often, and sometimes in large amounts. At some point, the use of money changed, paper notes were used instead of heavy and space taking coins. As the form of money changed so did the way of handling it. Before banknotes there was no need for wallets. Purses¹⁹ made out of leather or durable fabrics, for example cotton or flax, were used to carry coins and trinkets. One popular purse model was a wallet purse, or a long purse. It was oblong with a horizontal slot in the middle, the shape made it possible to store coins of a different value in the opposite ends of the purse. With the bourgeoisie, these purses were used to present one's wealth, like in this image of a wallet purse owned by August Widbäck, a former colonel who worked as a shopkeeper, office clerk and later as an accountant for the Rosenlew corporation.

Image 1: This purse was called a wallet purse or a long purse; it was used to carry small trinkets and coins. This model opens horizontally in the middle, and coins of different values were stored in the different ends. One of the meanings, in this kind of wallets, was to present your wealth to other people.

Wallet purse SM 12549, photo by Anu Virtanen



While a purse was ideal for carrying coins and small trinkets, a larger, flatter container was necessary to safeguard precious letters, papers and bank bills. What we today call a wallet was in the 18th and 19th century named as a pocket book. At first it was a small book that contained a small plate made out of ivory where one could make notes on.²⁰ Mentions about this kind of pocket book can be found in contemporary literature, for example in Tobias Smollett's novel *Roderick Random*.

¹⁹ A purse, or a coin purse, is a small money bag or a pouch, made for carrying coins.

²⁰ Wiséhn 2006, 27

These pocket books were not just the forefather of the wallet, but development of the pocket books got different versions and meanings as Vanda Foster brings forward in her work *Bags and Purses*. Pocket books had plenty of potential, and publishers were quick to realize this. In 1769 the *Ladies' Complete Pocket Book* was published, which was soon followed by the *New and Fashionable Pocket Book* and many others. These pocket books contained printed poems, recipes, menus, songs and dances, and hackney coach fares. And a few pocket books also included an engraved plate showing the latest styles in hats and headdresses. Thus from the basic contents of the lady's pocket book developed the modern woman's magazine. Women were renowned for making great use of these books, as written in a poem published in the *Gentlemen's Magazine* in 1753 listing a typical content of a pocket book '*scandal, dress or china ware... A list of lovers, or of rhymes, or pug's disease, or Betty's crime's together with 'tea table heads' (headdresses), 'crippled verse', and 'silken shreads'* (probably samples of dress fabrics).²¹ The pocket books can be seen as information containers and storage cases, in which people held their important papers and memorabilia. They were important to their owners. The cover, the outside of the pocket book, was public and perhaps seen by others, as the inside of the pocket book and the things, mementoes and information it held, were private. Foster describes the different styles of a pocket book, where an extra pocket was added between the book and the case. And in some cases, the fragile items could be tucked between the pages of the book itself, and it was also an obvious hiding place for paper money.²²

The shape and materials can change, but if the object has a good basic function, the idea will stay the same. As the silk wallet was developed from the pocket book, it is obvious that as the materials and the appearance of the object changed, there were similar ideas behind it. Some of the silk wallets donated to museums in Finland, have contained papers which had belonged to one of the previous owner. Usually, these papers were notes and small letters²³, and in many cases the writer is unknown. The content of the pocket book was private. Even if they held some information, and news of the daily life, they have also contained some private notes and other memorabilia. Foster has examples about what people from different classes could have kept in their pocket books. A young maid could have had her own pocket book made out of leather or cotton, in which she could have kept popular lyrics and love letters. Whereas an elder

²¹ Foster 1985, 28-29

²² Foster 1985, 29

²³ Silk wallet NMF 2629:4, NMF 4924:34, NMF 34025:2, NMF 92001:142-143

gentleman's wallet might have contained press cuttings, a drawing made by his little grand-niece, and even a spring of jasmine once worn on the evening dress of his current idol.²⁴ There is a possibility that, as well as her English peers in Finland a young maid could have owned her own container made out of leather or cotton.

The way of using the object changes it. New models and versions are designed constantly, and ideas are picked up from one's surroundings. And as the usage changes, so does the form; this happened also to the pocket book as new group of objects was born. The use of a wallet started to change after the wealthier class started using banknotes. The first banknote in Sweden was printed in 1661, but it was not until the early 18th century, when it became commonly used by the gentry. Even after the banknote became in public use, most of the population still used coins, and when saving up, they did it with gold and silver. In the 18th century people started to make the pocket books and wallets out of silk. The wallets made out of silk originate from the customs of the gentry, nobles and bourgeois.²⁵ And they were, as Wisèhn presents, mainly a manly accessory, which by its form fitted better to the men's costume than women's costume. But the silk letter cases in Finland, they were also used by women as well as men. A good number of these letter cases, pocket books and wallets, have survived from the past centuries as heirlooms in the family, and in the collections of museums.

The silk wallets studied in this thesis are dated back to the 18th and 19th century. They were a part of the respected hand works and through these objects, one was able to present one's abilities in hand work, the possibilities to have time to make these items, as well as acquire and use various expensive materials. As usual, even this cultural product was copied among the lower class. People used the materials they had in hand, as in silk wallet NMF 4069:2 (image 14) in which the base of the wallet was made out of linen, to make similar objects as the gentry in order to copy their habits and accessories as well as manners.

A silk wallet is rectangular and folded it two from the middle, it has two inside pockets opening to the middle and the cover are decorated with coloured embroidery. The size of a silk wallet is in general approximately 20 cm x 25 cm as opened. Silk wallet NMF 2578:8 (images 2 and 3) is an average size silk wallet, and it could be considered as a tidy example of silk wallets. It is 19,5 x 25,5 cm as opened. The covers

²⁴ Foster 1985, 30.

²⁵ Wisèhn 2006, 27

Image 2: Basic silk wallet, 19,5 x 25,5 cm when opened. The wallet is rectangular and decorated individually on both covers. Colourful decoration with floral motifs is generic embroidery on silk wallets, and usually the decoration has images or personal motifs as on this wallet.

Silk wallet National Museum of Finland 2578:8, photo by Anu Virtanen





Image 3: The pockets of the wallet open toward the middle. On the inner decoration the floral motifs and the repetition of the decorations continue. This silk wallet can be dated to the early 19th century by the year embroidered in the middle, and the initials G.B refers to the receiver, which in this case is unknown.

Silk wallet NMF 2578:8, photo by Anu Virtanen

are made out of white taffeta, and the lining out of white silk and the embroidery is made with coloured threads. On the cover there is a rectangular, colourful floral motif, general in silk wallet embroidery, with a building and a tree, and two doves in the middle. On the pocket covers there is a monogram G. B. and the year 1814 embroidered with brown thread in the middle of a rectangular grapevine.²⁶ With the year embroidered inside of the silk wallet, this wallet has been dated to the early 19th century. The year embroidered, or painted on the silk wallets, can be one way of defining the date the silk wallet was made.

Many silk wallets donated to the museums have contained nothing, or at least there are no mentions about any material findings in the object cards. We can ask why. Did the donators empty the silk wallets before donating them to the museum? If they

²⁶ Silk wallet NMF 2578:8, the red number painted on the wallet is the museum's object number according to which the objects are catalogued.

did, did they feel that the papers and other things inside the silk wallet were so important, or maybe unimportant to them, that they did not want to donate them as well? Or had the original owner of the wallet emptied it, before it was handed on in the family? It could have been that the donor thought that the silk wallet itself was meaningful, and because of that, had left out the papers it may have held. It is also a possibility, that many silk wallets have not contained any papers or memorabilia for years, as the item itself has been preserved in the family.

Some notes found from the silk wallets can give us more information about how the wallets were used, and who had made them. A silk wallet donated by the baroness Mellin, silk wallet NMF 2629:4, contained a note that had a childish scribble on it (images 4 and 5). At the time of the donation, the early nineteenth century, they believed that the note was written by Gustav IV Adolf.²⁷ As the note, or a copy of it, is not preserved with the silk wallet, and there is no certain information of the notes whereabouts, the truthfulness of the note, and its writer, cannot be certified. As baroness Mellin was a part of the Finish nobility, she could have had connections to the Swedish court, and from there to the royal family. So it is not impossible for the note to be written by the young Gustav. This silk wallet is unusual, not only for its content, but by its form as well. It was presumably made by Baroness Beata Fredrika Charlotta Mellin, the sister of Carl Reinhold Mellin, the one of the four Mellin brothers who married. He was married twice, to Dorotea Catarina Fredrika Stjenvall and later to Maria Forsblom, but there is no information of the time of the donation, so we cannot for sure say which of the Mrs. Mellins donated this silk wallet. This silk wallet is an envelope shape and it has two compartments. It is made out of white atlas silk and the lining is red silk, with green silk ribbon on the border. Only the outer cover is embroidered. On top of it there is an arrangement of a cane and a fruit basket, from where flower wines are hanging. On top, and on the sides of the arrangement, there are flower and ribbon decorations. On the other side there are similar floral – ribbon decorations on the top corners, the ribbons connect in the middle forming an oval with a French quote; *Ametie et sincèritè voila ma devise*²⁸.

There are some other cases where a silk wallet has contained notes. A silk wallet NMF 4924:34, bought from Miss Meinander's auction, contained papers that had belonged to her aunt, Emma Solitander, which indicates that the wallet had belonged to the aunt. Sometimes the note found inside a silk wallet can give information about the

²⁷ Silk wallet NMF 2629:4.

²⁸ Friendship and sincerity here is my motto, translation Anu Virtanen

maker and why that particular wallet had been made, as with silk wallet NMF 37046:38, which contained a paper note “*Made by Johanna Hoslenius to her fiancé in 1810*”.

Not every silk wallet ended up in a museum intentionally; silk wallet NMF 2294:32 arrived to the National Museum of Finland among a donation containing papers and notes by Henrik August Reinholm, a Finnish priest and ethnologist. He was one of the first actual collectors of Finnish folklore. As the papers were donated to the museum, it was clear that these papers held some value to the giver and to the receiver as they wanted to preserve them. Did the donator knew about this silk wallet as he or she was donating the papers to the museum? Why was this wallet contained with the papers, was it considered to have similar meaning as these papers? There is no information or knowledge of why this wallet has ended up in the museum.



Image 4; This silk wallet differs from the majority of the silk wallets by its envelope shape and compartments opening at the sides of the wallet. The inside of the wallet is red silk with no decorations or embroidery.

*Silk wallet NMF 2629:4,
photo by Anu Virtanen*



Image 5; The cover of the silk wallet NMF 2629:4. The covers of the wallet are decorated with colourful embroidery with flowers and a flower basket, and on the other side a rhyme as the middle decoration. This wallet contained a note with a childish scribble on it. At the time of the donation it was believed that the note was written by Gustav IV Adolf.

Silk wallet NMF 2629:4, photo by Anu Virtanen

The interesting fact is that from the silk wallets preserved in the collections of the National Museum of Finland and the Satakunta Museum, no actual paper bank notes have been found, only a few notes and letters. Did people actually keep money in these objects? Or were the silk wallets merely used as a case for memorabilia such as letters and notes? This seems to have been the case with the majority of the silk wallets, as bank notes were not found inside the wallets.

This kind of tradition of silk wallets is not universal. Silk wallets can be found mainly in Northern Europe, mostly in Sweden and Finland, and in some cases, and in some shape or form in England. There are also proves that this similar silk wallet tradition has occurred in our eastern neighbor Russia, as one silk wallet (image 7), have been, by the information by its donor, made in Russia, as another silk wallet, NMF contains a text embroidery in Russian ²⁹ (images 46 and 47). This would be understandable, as the traditions and styles moved from one country to another by the traders and travelers, as well as letters written to relatives living abroad.

In Europe, courts had close relationships with each other, different styles and fashion spread easily from country to country. If this silk wallet phenomenon would have originated for example from France, similar items would be found in other European countries, and they would have spread also to the other side of Europe, to Portugal. But in Portugal, there is no information, or knowledge about silk wallets. As I was visiting the Museu Nacional de Traje, where they have a wide collection of handbags, wallets and purses used by men and women, they had not seen these kinds of wallets, which are opened in half and contained two compartments on each side, or the ones that before held a bank note inside of them. The silk wallets in Portugal are shaped like an envelope; they open from the top and contained usually one pocket which had a flap concealing the wallet (image 6). The wallet has one or two compartments opening from the top. These wallets are decorated with colourful silk and metal thread embroidery. ³⁰ Looking at the different silk wallet models, and how they have spread through northern Europe, the conclusion is that the silk wallet phenomenon studied here, originated from Sweden. Finland was part of Sweden from the 13th century, and in the 19th century became part of the Grand duchy of Russia. But the connections to Sweden were still strong, as were the recent traditions, there for the silk wallet remained its position as a gentry class handwork.

²⁹ Silk wallet NMF 7336, NMF 4858:4

³⁰ Silk wallet Museu Nacional de Traje 15607

Image 6: A Portuguese silk wallet. The wallet has an envelope shape with one, or two compartments opening from the top. These wallets were entirely embroidered with colorful silk threads and gold threads.



Silk wallet Museu Nacional de Traje 15607, photo by Anu Virtanen

In England, silk wallets from the first half of the 18th century, had the simple envelope or flapped wallet form like Portuguese silk wallets. These English wallets were decorated with colourful silks and metal threads, or even with straw. Towards the end of the century a new style appeared which was similar to the silk wallets in Scandinavia, this silk wallet type contained a division between the two extending and folding back as a scalloped flap over the top compartment.³¹ A few silk wallets in the National Museum's collection have a similar, envelope style structure³². They contain usually one pocket and are smaller than the other silk wallets. One disjunctive feature is that the silk wallets in the National Museum of Finland collection do not have this kind of divisions between the two pockets as in England. Even the silk wallet in the National Museum's collection which is folded³³ contain no scalloped flaps. This indicates that the silk wallets here in Finland and in Sweden, are a specific group.

Expensive and luxurious silk wallets seem to have been made for more festive situations and not for everyday use, in which they would have used wallets and purses made out of more common and durable materials.³⁴ This is understandable as silk is a very delicate material, where stains and the use will show more easily than in some other fabrics. In addition, the silk wallets were affected by the luxury code - clothes and objects made out of silk were considered as luxury, and were only available to the

³¹ Foster 1985, 30.

³² Silk wallet NMF 2629:3-4, NMF 4983:5, NMF 5581:1, NMF 6219, NMF 7690:3, NMF 8293:2-3, NMF 70101

³³ Silk wallet NMF 1929

³⁴ Wisehn 2006, 29

gentry. A number of silk wallets, held in the museums, are in awful shape ³⁵, they are dirty and worn out like the silk wallet NMF 7336 (image 7) mentioned before. This silk wallet appears to have been used as the wallet is torn from the fold, the edges have been worn out and one fourth of the cover is missing. The wallet is hardened with paper, as can be seen in image 7 - this technique ³⁶ was used to contain the shape of the wallet. The interesting thing about this wallet is that the decoration seems to be unfinished; the circle on the cover is empty and there are no traces of embroidery. These circles were usually the places for personal decorations referring to the receiver. This wallet was not finished, but still it seems to have been used. Many silk wallets in poor condition were preserved by sewing a sheer fabric around it, as this silk wallet. The decoration is another point from which you can see evidences of the use. Some of the embroideries have unraveled due to the use. The beadings have loosened up, or detached, as the silk wallet has been taken in and out from a pocket or from another tight or small place. There is also a possibility that the damage to these wallets has come from poor and careless storing, as well as from small animals and insects, which might have destroyed



Image 7: The inside of the wallet is almost destroyed, and the pockets are no longer there. Only the shire fabric sewn around the wallet keeps it from falling apart.

NMF 7336, photo by Anu Virtanen

³⁵ Silk wallet SM 1153, NMF 176:1b, NMF 2045:19, SM 3869, NMF 4097, NMF 4351:5, NMF 7336, NMF 30081:1-2

³⁶ Silk wallet NMF 1746:1c, NMF 2364:1, NMF 4659:5, NMF 4858:3-4, 6, NMF 4983:5, NMF 5417, NMF 6219, NMF 6333:1, NMF 7336, NMF 8293:3, NMF 37046, NMF 44002:5



Image 8: Silk wallet NMF 7336 is in awful condition, the fold and the edges are torn, and the paper used to harden the wallet can be seen. This Russian made silk wallet is not finished; parts of the decoration have unraveled, as can be seen on the edge embroidery where the holes and the embroidery motifs can be seen, but the oval circle in the middle of the top cover is clear, there are no traces of any unraveled embroidery.

NMF 7336, photo by Anu Virtanen

the fabric. This, however, does not explain all the stains and the dirtiness but it would explain why some silk wallets are in worse condition compared to some other silk wallets. One can find out more about how silk wallets were used, by looking at the shape and the condition of the wallet. Which parts of the wallet are in cleaner and in better shape, and in which parts of the wallet is broken or dirty. Some wallets have clearly been mementoes that have not been in use, or at least have not been in heavy use, as they are in good shape and do not have any stains on them³⁷.

One used and worn out silk wallet SM 3869, has been created as a patchwork quilt (images 9 and 10), by attaching pieces of white silk together, thus the fact that the wallet is made out of smaller pieces, seems to be somewhat intentional. The interior, the pockets are made out of individual silk pieces and it is in fairly better shape than the outside, which seems to have been patched few times. The embroidery is badly worn, especially the middle embroideries. But the remaining embroidery is quite neat. In this case, it is possible that the maker did not have a larger piece of silk from which to make a silk wallet, or perhaps this one is made from leftover material. The ragged embroidery and the stains refer that this wallet has been used.

We also have to understand, that time affects these objects. These items are over 200 years old and we cannot expect them to be in perfect condition. And do we really want that? By having these imperfections, these objects tell us much more than if they were all in good condition. These silk wallets were used. They were not made to be kept only in drawers; the silk wallets were mementoes as well as used to preserve mementoes. In some cases by using the silk wallet you could have been valuing the maker by keeping the item itself close to you. Some of them may have been in more frequent use than others and some were used to store memories and because of it they have survived in good condition.

The wallet developed after bank notes became in use and they developed from pocket books in which contained an ivory plate where people could make notes on. Silk wallets were one form of wallets, in which people from the upper classes would keep and preserve their mementoes, precious letters and papers. These silk wallets contain both the public and private; the outside covers and the embroidery were seen by others, and perhaps used to inform of the position and the class of the owner, as the inside covers of the wallet as well as the content was private. The culture of the silk wallet tradition studied here is a Swedish-Finnish tradition; silk wallets in different shapes and

³⁷ Silk wallet SM 5413, NMF 6333:1, NMF 6324:7, NMF 26060:1, NMF 42066:27-27



Image 9: This silk wallet was created as a patchwork quilt, by attaching white silk pieces together. This wallet has been used as the silk has been strained and dirty. The decorations are partly worn out and many of the sequins are missing. From the embroidery you can see the various uses of the different needlework techniques; the decorations made with smaller stitches have survived as the embroidery with larger stitches has unraveled.

Silk wallet SM 3869, photo by Any Virtanen



Image 10: This silk wallet is a good example of a used wallet, as the pocket openings and the edges are worn out, this refers to the fact that this silk wallet was used more than just to preserve memorabilia. The decorations in the middle circles are gone, due to usage or perhaps they were taken away.

Silk wallet SM 3869, photo by Anu Virtanen

uses can be found in England and Portugal, having similar shapes and uses they are still somewhat different from the silk wallets that were used here in Scandinavia.

2.2. The Art and Craft of Silk Wallets

Knowledge in craft used to be self-evident for women in all classes and certain skills were required from an early age regardless of their social class and handiness. Average households were self-sufficient concerning textiles. Sewing, darning and patching were part of everyday life, and all the women in the household took part of these chores. Handmade items were a display of one's skills. Making decorative handwork took time and effort, and many times they required expensive materials. For a woman to be able to make these elaborate handy pieces instead of managing the basic tasks of everyday house work, it was an indication of her class and position in the society. Everyone was not able to make them because of lack of time or supplies; one needed time to be idle to be able to make lavish handwork. For example, a maid did not have the time to sit down and embroider decorative handwork, whereas this was a daily task for a gentry woman.

³⁸ And a talented wife was able to manage the household effortlessly, and still have time to sew elaborate embroidery. From a young age, girls would learn how to make different needlework and use various sewing equipments, from the basic handlings of the material by carding tools to spinning wheel, and decorating with sequins and threads.

The most important sewing equipment was a needle. The finer embroidery demanded a very thin needle, where as in cross-stitching a needle with a round point was needed. The eye of the needle had to be very well ground, so that the thread could go through it easily, and the needle would not break the strand of the thread. The English made needles were considered the best. Women, who embroidered frequently, had plenty of different needles that were secured in a needle book or a needle case, to prevent any rusting or breaking. Well-equipped pincushion with many needles and pins, was also considered as a status object which was placed on the sewing or dressing table for others to see. ³⁹

In order to ease the embroidering, there was a development of different sewing equipment which secured the work on hand from additional stress, as well as protected the makers hands. To make the embroidering easier one could use a sewing frame, a wooden circle where the fabric could be stretched to keep the fabric tight as the detailed

³⁸ Suominen 2011

³⁹ Lampinen 1985, 4

decoration was embroidered on it. A thimble, or a sewing ring, was needed in all sewing and embroidery to help to push the needle through the fabric. Embroidery threads were wound around a base of a ball to keep them from tangling together. And sewing wax made the thread slide more easily.⁴⁰ These items were the basis of women's handwork equipment, and they were usually kept in a box to preserve them. Jacobina Munsterhjelm had her own sewing box where she preserved a thimble and two sewing rings made out of silver (image 11). To be able to own these kinds of



Image 11: Jacobina Munsterhjelm's sewing box that contains a thimble and two sewing rings made out of silver. Decorated items are held carefully in a draped box to cover and preserve these items. One can see that these items have been important and cherished. The quality of the items, and the box itself, refers to a gentry family.

Sewing box Svenska Litteratur Sällskapet, photo by Janne Renvall

⁴⁰ Lehto 1985, 30.

items at that age was also a proof of her family's situation. The box is also decorative; it seems to have a leather covering w seems to have been decorated by forcing patterns on the leather. The inside of the box is also carefully done; the fabric draping covering in the box proves that this was made for gentry.

The embroidering techniques varied due to the thread used as well as the image itself. One popular embroidery technique, which seems to have been surprisingly rare among the silk wallets, is cross stitching known from the 17th century. Instead of the other finer embroidery, in cross stitching a blunt headed needle was used. This embroidery technique was most commonly used on an evenly woven cloth, where the weave forms a grid and the stitch is made from the grids corner to corner. The one silk wallet with cross stitching embroidery is wallet 58092:1 (images 12 and 13). In order to obtain a beautiful surface, the stitches were made so that the threads are parallel to the crosswise. A skillful cross stitcher kept, and still does keep, the back side of the embroidery neat.

During the 1740s both the fabrics and embroideries were light and airy. Free embroidery occurred in the 18th and early 19th centuries⁴¹, which can also be seen in the silk wallets. Unlike cross stitching, free embroidery was independent from the weaving technique. Patterns were usually various floral and garland motifs that were sewn with different stitches to a one coloured base. The model was either drawn straight to the fabric or on a paper, on which the contours of the image was perforated, the paper attached on the fabric and soot or other coloring substance was sprinkled on the paper in which case the pattern was outlined on the fabric through the holes.⁴² These motifs and patterns are used even today as well as the methods.

In the 18th century white work embroidery was also popular. This technique was used to replace the foreign lace prohibited by the luxury regulation. White work embroidery is a technique where the stitching is the same colour as the founding fabric. To produce similar lace like effect small holes which were bordered with small stitches were used. This became even more popular in the 19th century as the women's dress fashion preferred white color, this came from the admiration of the Antiques as well as the cheap cotton linen produced in America. White work embroidery kept its

⁴¹ Wiséhn 2006, 30

⁴² Lehto 1985, 25



Image 12: The embroidering in this particular silk wallet is made with cross stitching making it stand out from the other ways embroidered silk wallets. The other distinguishing feature is the hunting scene on the cover - as the decoration usually focuses on flowers, views and singular items of figures.

Silk wallet NMF 58092:1, photo by Anu Virtanen



Image 13: The cross stitching in this wallet is fine and detailed, and with the subtle change of the colors, the decorations becomes vivid. The silk wallet was made and given by Fredrique Långenhjelm to her husband Alexander Ugglä, to whom the initials A. U. refers to.

Silk wallet NMF 58092:1, photo by Anu Virtanen

popularity in nightgowns, lingerie, linen and especially bride handkerchiefs.⁴³ Another common needle works in embroidering, in addition to cross stitching in the 19th century, were the petite point and pearl brodering. Interestingly, despite of its popularity, the white work embroidery was not used on silk wallets, where embroidery with colours and different nature motifs were used.

Young girls, who would practice needlework, would also embroider small pictures. The base fabric would usually be white atlas silk and the models would be taken from samplers or old gravures⁴⁴. Silk wallet NMF 4069:2 (images 14 and 15) was decorated with typical sampler pattern. With black grid around the green and yellow-red 'floral' stylistic patterns in the middle, and a name *Margareta Magdalena Leopoldi* cross stitched on the edges of the pockets. Interestingly the pattern is remained in good shape as the wallet is worn from the inside. Even with the pattern, this silk wallet differs from the other silk wallets as the whole outside is embroidered with the same pattern. A similar grid pattern is used in silk wallets NMF 1225:2 and NMF 4924:3, where the wallet has been made, contrary to other wallets, on a cured base covered with colourful silk thread grid. On the former, the colours are yellow – pink- red –blue composed so that the colors darken toward bottom. As in the later, yellow – orange – red threads are composed on top of the others, so that the lightest, yellow threads form the base as the vividly coloured red threads create the cover grid.⁴⁵ These silk wallet decorations are strikingly different from the usual silk wallet embroidery. Was this an anonymous fashion trend or a foreign idea?

What if a young girl was not able to make a skillful silk wallet? What if she was not so talented and it clearly took quite an effort in making delicate embroidery. What if her talents in embroidering were not so good, and for some reason, she was not able to develop her skills to match with the other girls? Could this have influenced on her future, and even her chances of getting married? Reading about women's handwork in the 18th and 19th centuries, the basic thought was that every girl had to learn to sew and to embroider. But what if you were not so talented in embroidering? Could the quality of embroidery replace the difficult models? There must have been a difference in between a talented sewer and embroiderer and a girl whose talents allowed her to make only simple handwork and models. A girl who did not know how to make elaborate embroidering could have made simpler decorations and models. In this case,

⁴³ Lehto 1985, 25

⁴⁴ A picture made by printing a picture on a paper using an etched plates or a cylinder

⁴⁵ The National Museum of Finland, Silk wallets 1225:2, 4924:3



Image 14: Embroideries used in samplers can be found in other handwork as well, as in this wallet; the base is linen, and it is covered with small petite point stitching creating a flower grid pattern.

Silk Wallet NMF 4069:2, photo by Anu Virtanen



Image 15: Interestingly the patterns have survived well, whereas the inside of the wallet and the edges of the pockets are worn out. On the openings of the pockets, the name of Margareta Magdalena Leopoldi is embroidered, who might have been the owner of the wallet.

Silk wallet NMF 4069:2, photo by Anu Virtanen



Images 16-17: Colourful silk grid forms the decoration of this wallet. The subtle yellow creates the base as the bright red forms the cover grid. Not only is the cover decoration different from the other wallets but the pockets are opened from the sides of the wallets, not in the middle.

Silk wallet NMF 4924:3, photo by Anu Virtanen



it seems that the main point in the embroidering was to make as smart and presentable result as possible. The quality of the embroidery could have also affected how the message of the decoration was interpreted. Silk wallet NMF 1746:1b⁴⁶ made by a young pension girl is a good example of unskillful embroidery (image 18). The wallet itself is somewhat clumsy and the embroidery is, compared to some other silk wallet, substandard. It has clearly been made by either a beginner or a girl whose talents in handwork and embroidering are not so good or developed. This wallet was one of the three silk wallets donated by Privy Councilor Radde in 1875 (image 18).

Vanda Foster has found an example of a professionally made silk wallet. In 1779 Queen Charlotte presented Mrs Delany with a pocket case: *The outside white satin, work'd with gold, and ornamented with gold spangles; the inside... is lined with pink satin, and contains a knife, sizzars, pencele, rule, compas, bodkin, and a more that I can say; but it is all gold and mother of pearl. At one end there was a little letter case that contained a letter directed to Mrs. Delany, written in the Queen's own hand.* This example was the work of a professional, but many others were home-made, and in the 1780's, the Lady's Magazine issued several patterns for embroidered pocket books. With the silk wallets in Finland, there is no accurate evidence of a professionally made silk wallet. With a silk wallet NMF 42066:28, there is a mention on the object card that it could have been made by a professional, but this seems to be the opinion of the person who documented the wallet. The wallet is quite skillfully made, it is heavy and sturdy, and it is obvious that this wallet was made by, if not a professional, at least by someone who was highly talented (image 19-20).

Knowledge in handwork was self-evident for all women in all classes, the skills were learned from an early age and through them women could display their competence. The possibility to make these elaborate embroideries as well as posses the equipments to make them was an indication of one's status and wealth. Making of the embroidery required thin needles and colourful silk threads. A thimble and sewing ring were other common equipments helping to make delicate embroidery. The embroidery techniques varied due to the thread in use as well as the motif. As the hand work was used to present one's skills, the more competent embroiderers were able to make more elaborate models than the less skillful girls, who continued with the easier and familiar models.

⁴⁶ silk wallet 1746:1a, for some reason three silk wallet from the same donor has the same object number, to separate them from each other, there is letter a, b or c added to the number.



Image 38: Compared to the silk wallet presented in the images 16 and 37, this wallet has clearly have been made by either a beginner, or a girl whose talents in handwork and embroidering are not so good or developed.

The national Museum of Finland, silk wallet, 1746:1b photo by Anu Virtanen



Image 19: According to the object card, this silk wallet was professionally made. The embroidery is detailed and skillful compared to some other silk wallets.

Silk wallet NMF 42066:28, photo by Anu Virtanen



Image 20: Interestingly this wallet has no personal details, as the inner decorations are blank in the middle. The lacking personal touch in the embroidery supports the idea of this being professionally made. They could have been left blank for the buyer so that she could make finishing touches and add perhaps initials and a year to the wallet.

Silk wallet NMF 42066:28, photo by Anu Virtanen

2.3. Decorating the wallets

In the 18th century the Finnish gentry was strongly connected to the Swedish culture. Swedish court and the Swedish noble influenced the manners and fashion of Finnish gentry. And as the Swedish court was influenced by the courts in Europe in fashion and style, it was understandable that the ideas of Europe would spread to Finland as well. Fashion ideas and dressing was not the only thing that spread from Europe. The materials and decorations used in different handwork were also influenced by the European fashion. In addition, the styles and accessories spread by the merchants and businessmen as they had their daughters with them as they travelled. Young girls would keep their eyes open and copy the new styles they witnessed. Using certain decoration and materials, one could indicate one's status and the value of the object made. It was not always important to have expensive and decorative sole material as it was to invest on the cover materials, in this case luxurious silk, and the materials and themes used in the decoration.⁴⁷

At the same time with the free embroidery, printed models started to spread. Perhaps the most extensive circulation, according to Wiséhn, had L. W. Wittich's models. He was a Berlin publisher, who got interested in his wife's hand drawn embroidery models. He started to print the models and selling them. Doing so he also worked as an employer for women as he hired women to hand colour the models. Other publishers started to copy his example and German embroidery models spread out through Europe all the way to America and even to Australia.⁴⁸ Unfortunately there is no certain information if the decorations used in the silk wallets were made from these kinds of models. There are a few indicators that some models were more commonly used and copied, as the cover embroidery in the silk wallet NMT 1746:1c is similar to the embroidery in silk wallet NMT 1746:1b (image 18). Both of these silk wallets were made in pensions by young gentry girls, it is possible that both of the girls were studying in the same pension, or that the decoration here was taken from a model used in pensions.

Models were also used in cross stitching. The embroidery in silk wallet NMF 58092:1 (images 12 and 13) is very likely made from a model, as the images are detailed and specific. In the cross stitch models, the squares are marked with symbols or colors in order to create an image. With these instructions, it is easy to trace the picture

⁴⁷ Suominen, 2011.

⁴⁸ Wiséhn 2006, 36



Image 21: Some silk wallets were never finished. This hand work is presumably made for an idea to make a silk wallet, but for some reason it was left unfinished. You can see the detailed embroideries and models made with fine black silk thread. The idea of the decoration is visible as the drawn model is still remained on the fabric.

Silk wallet NMF 7847:3, photo by Anu Virtanen

on a fabric. To an uneven woven fabric a cross stitching could be done by using an equally squared support fabric. Embroidery was also used on a woollen fabric to cover the expensive foreign fabrics. The most beautiful result was made with silk embroidery, which replaced the prohibited imported brocade by the luxury regulation in 18th century. Decoration models used in the silk wallets may have been taken, and perhaps altered, from printed embroidery models. These printed, full color designs were available during the 19th century. Eager embroiderers could have dozens of models which were borrowed and copied amongst friends. Embroidery was used in all kind of decorations; boxes, wallets, hand bags, shoulder straps, garters, even on the covers of a spit buckets.⁴⁹

Silk wallets were decorated commonly with embroidery, which were usually various images and motifs taken from the nature. Edges were usually decorated with colourful ribbons or sewing a lace decoration on the edges. The majority of the embroideries in silk wallets were made with colourful silk threads. Flowers were embroidered using small sand beads as well as petite point stitching which were sewn using thin threads from a strand of silk. At the end of the century, the stitching became larger as wool threads were used in embroidery. Addition to silk threads, ribbons, metal threads and sequins were used in embroidering silk wallets. With metal threads and sequins one was able to create a multi dimensional decorations as well as layering silk threads and ribbons. With a needle and a thread a skillful embroiderer was able to create a similar impression as with paintbrush and colours. According to Lehto, in the change of the 18th and 19th centuries the skies and the skin of characters were usually painted, as the rest of the decorations were done by sewing.⁵⁰ In silk wallet NMF 1302 (images 20 and 21) the decoration was made by painting. And as there is proof that both of these methods have been used in silk wallets, it is interesting that there are no silk wallets that hold both of these decoration methods. This can be merely a coincidence⁵¹, or an indication that the embroidery was considered more valuable and meaningful than painting. Or perhaps, the means of making painted decorations were not available to everyone.

⁴⁹ Lehto 1985, 30

⁵⁰ Lehto 1985, 25

⁵¹ The silk wallets are received from donors, and this usually defines the nature of museum collections; they are largely gathered of items given to the museum by people, not by pre-planned collecting covering all the varieties of the items.



Image 22: Embroidering was not the only way to decorate silk wallets. Using paint, one was able to create a smooth and vivid images. By interpreting the decoration, which refers to the receiver's military career, this wallet belonged to a high soldier.

Silk wallet NMF 1302, photo by Anu Virtanen

As mentioned before, embroidering was not the only option in decorating wallets, as paint, markers and ink was used in their own, or together with embroidery. By using paint, one could create smooth and colourful images. Printing with stamp images can be found in few wallets, but it is obvious, that embroidering the decorations was the most popular method. This could be, as by making the decorations by hand, that the outcome was more personal than using premade models. With this stamp technique, the patterns are neat and detailed, but the outcome in silk wallet NMF 6157:13 is sloppy. The patterns are arranged so that the inner image, a bee nest with a sheaf and a sickle on its both sides are surrounded by different vines with ear of a grain plants on the corners. Same decorations are repeated on the inside, only differently paralleled.



Image 23: Embroidering or painting were not the only ways to decorate a silk wallet. This wallet was made with printing technique. The printing is sloppy, but was it the technique which was more important with this wallet? The inner decorations reflect the covers with the difference that the bee nest patterns are positioned in a parallel way. Silk wallet NMF 6157:13, photo by Anu Virtanen

In the early 18th century floral motifs were popular, and they can be found in almost in every silk wallet decoration. Various floral vines circle the center motifs, and many central decorations contain flowers in them. Popular flower motifs were roses⁵² and forget-me-nots⁵³. They were the most popular flowers in the embroideries. Other recognizable flowers are cloves⁵⁴ or carnations⁵⁵ along tulips⁵⁶ identifiable also. In few wallets, cherry blossoms⁵⁷, bachelor buttons⁵⁸ and moonflowers⁵⁹. Among flowers, there are also other natural motifs used in the embroidery, such as palm leaves and branch s as well as wheat⁶⁰.

Parts of the motifs embroidered on the wallet embody the feelings, ideas and hopes, or they represent a profession. A heart, two hearts or burning hearts⁶¹ are clear symbols of loving affections. A vine, bow or an arrow⁶², can refer to cupid, as they are presented many times with other love symbols, the hearts and flowers for example roses, tulips and forget-me-nots. Flower baskets and the three of life, which can be found in many silk wallets⁶³ symbolize fertility and the importance of reproduction. Luck and success were presented with the staff of mercury and torch.⁶⁴ A crab embroidered in this kind of work indicated a young man, a dog a brave man and a male deer to a wise man. A ladder represented a person who advanced in his career. Innocence and hospitality expected from a young lady and from a good wife was illustrated by a deer, flower, soup bowl and a key.⁶⁵ While many decorations had a floral design, sometimes the motif related to the recipient, his or hers career, occupation or status, for example the succors and a rod⁶⁶ reffering to a tailor, weapons and flags⁶⁷ representing the receiver's military career, as a rake⁶⁸, a sheaf⁶⁹, a scythe⁷⁰ and a staff⁷¹

⁵² Silk wallets 5299:3, 26060:1, 6341:3, 48025:1, 2045:19, 5633:8, 3727, 4858:6, 2364:1, 4985:3, 5633:9, 4659:5, 4858:3, 5227:2

⁵³ Silk wallets 2364:1, 8092:2, 5633:8, 4517, 4659:5, 4858:3, 5299:3

⁵⁴ Silk wallets 5227:2, 2120, 4659:5, 2045:19

⁵⁵ Silk wallet 7656:27

⁵⁶ Silk wallet 5633:9, 2045:19

⁵⁷ Silk wallet 6333:1

⁵⁸ silk wallet 8092:2

⁵⁹ silk wallet 5581

⁶⁰ Silk wallet 6157:3, 6023:2, 4097:6

⁶¹ Silk wallet 2294:32, 37104:4, 6324:7, 7478:5

⁶² Silk wallet 6333:1, 4762:2, 4858:4, 29015:18, 41001:1153, 29015:18

⁶³ Silk wallet 2660:1, 6023:2, 5299:3, 5299:4, 7849, 8293:2, 26060:1, 30081:1, 37104:4, 44002:4, 4157

⁶⁴ Laitinen 1985, 19, silk wallet 41001 :1136

⁶⁵ Laitinen 1985, 19

⁶⁶ Silk wallet 44002:4

⁶⁷ Silk wallet 1302, 1746:1a, 6324:7, 4517, 7847:1

⁶⁸ Silk wallet 2045:19, 5633:8, 4097:6, 5299:4, 41001:1136, 48025:1

⁶⁹ Silk wallet 2045:19, 4097:6, 41001:1136, 48025:1, 6157:3, 30081:2, 34025:2

⁷⁰ Silk wallet 2045:19, 5633:8, 41001:1136, 4097:6, 8293:2



Images 24 and 25: The decoration patterns used in embroidery were usually different floral and vine motifs. Roses, tulips and forget-me-nots can be recognized from the decorations, referring to loving affections. The floral and vine motif continues inside the wallet, combining the inner decoration to the outside embroidery. This silk wallet was apparently made as a souvenir, in which the text “Par Reconnoissances” refers to. The monogram C.F.M. on the right side of the wallet may refer to the recipient.

Silk wallet SM 5413, photo by Anu Virtanen



⁷¹ Silk wallet 6333:1, 4097:6



Images 26 and 27 (page 46): The two burning hearts on the altar refer to a young love, which is enhanced with the forget-me-nots on the side of the decorations. The weapons above refer to the male receiver, who perhaps was a soldier. This wallet has been made either as an engagement present or as a wedding present; the monograms on the pocket covers (C.O.M and A.L.A) are of the receiving couple. The different sure name initials, M and A, suggest this was an engagement present.

Silk wallet NMF 6324:7, photos by Anu Virtanen



as portraying a landowner or a *pitäjänapulainen*⁷². Music instruments were also popular; with a violin, a lute, music notes, a flute and a lyre, harp, drum, or with a group of instruments⁷³ the cultural atmosphere could be presented.

Not always did the maker settle embroidering objects and flowers on the silk wallet. Sometimes the decoration reflects the life of the 18th and the 19th centuries; these silk wallets are decorated with images of landscapes, places and events. These decorations present what people might have seen around them in the country side; a man with a horse plowing a field⁷⁴, two men working on a hay field⁷⁵, a scenery with buildings and trees⁷⁶, a cottage by the lake as in silk wallet NMF 8293:2 (image 27) or a hunting scene as in silk wallet NMF 58092:1 (images 12 and 13). Some of these images are delicately made, almost like paintings. These images can be the receiver's home scenery or another important view, which has been immortalized by the embroiderer.

⁷² Pitäjänapulainen was a permanent positioned priest, comparable to an assistant vicar, who's salary was paid by the congregation.

⁷³ Silk wallet 8092:2, 29015:18, 1746:1a, 7690:3, 2578:71302, 8293:2, 8111:127

⁷⁴ Silk wallet 2578:7

⁷⁵ Silk wallet 5939:16

⁷⁶ Silk wallet 2578:8, 54100:7, 4858:3, 8293:2, 26060:1, 61020:2, 37104:4



Image 28: Some embroidery on the silk wallets are almost like paintings, small images of the 18th and the 19th centuries. On the upper decoration there is a lady in an empire dress leaning on a light blue urn, and on the lower decoration a man is portrayed by a red cottage.

Silk wallet NMF 8293:2, photo by Anu Virtanen

The decorations are not always images of flower and other items, there are also small quotes and rhymes, or wishes and thoughts embroidered or written on the wallets⁷⁷ and in some decorations, one can also find humoristic point of view of the text painted or embroidered on the wallet.⁷⁸ As flowers are the most used decoration in silk wallets appearing in almost every wallet, another major pattern that appears in the decoration are monograms and initials⁷⁹. These alphabets refer mostly to the receiver, but in few cases to the giver and to the maker. The close family ties and the importance of them can also be seen in the monograms as they usually referred to close relatives. By embroidering, or painting, the receiver's initials on the wallet, one indicates that this particular object is given and therefore belongs to this particular person. Popular motifs for an engagement or a wedding gift were to combine together the couple's initials and some motifs that refer to love and companionship. Many cases the wife to be embroidered a decorative silk wallet to her future husband with their initials and the year of their marriage⁸⁰.



Image 29: A gift for a happy couple, similar initials indicate this was a wedding present. Family connections and the importance of the family ties were manifested in monograms of close relatives.

Silk wallet SM 6745, photo by Anu Virtanen

⁷⁷ Silk wallet 1746:1c, 2629:4, 4707, 4987:11, 5227:1, 6341:3, 7847:1, 7847:2, 7847:3, 41001:1136, 44002:5

⁷⁸ Wiséhn 2006, 29.

⁷⁹ Silk wallet 1746:1a, 1844:7, 2045:19, 2120, 2294:32, 2364:1, 2578:6, 2578:8, 5633:9, 4517, 3727:2, 4351:5, 4707:3, 4858:3, 4987:11, 5227:2, 6219, 6341:3, 7690:3, 7656:27, 7847:1-3, 7849, 26060:1, 30081:1, 34025:2, 37046:38, 37104:4, 41001:1135–1136, 42066:27, 44022:4, 48025:1, 50086, 58092:1,

⁸⁰ Laitinen 1985, 19

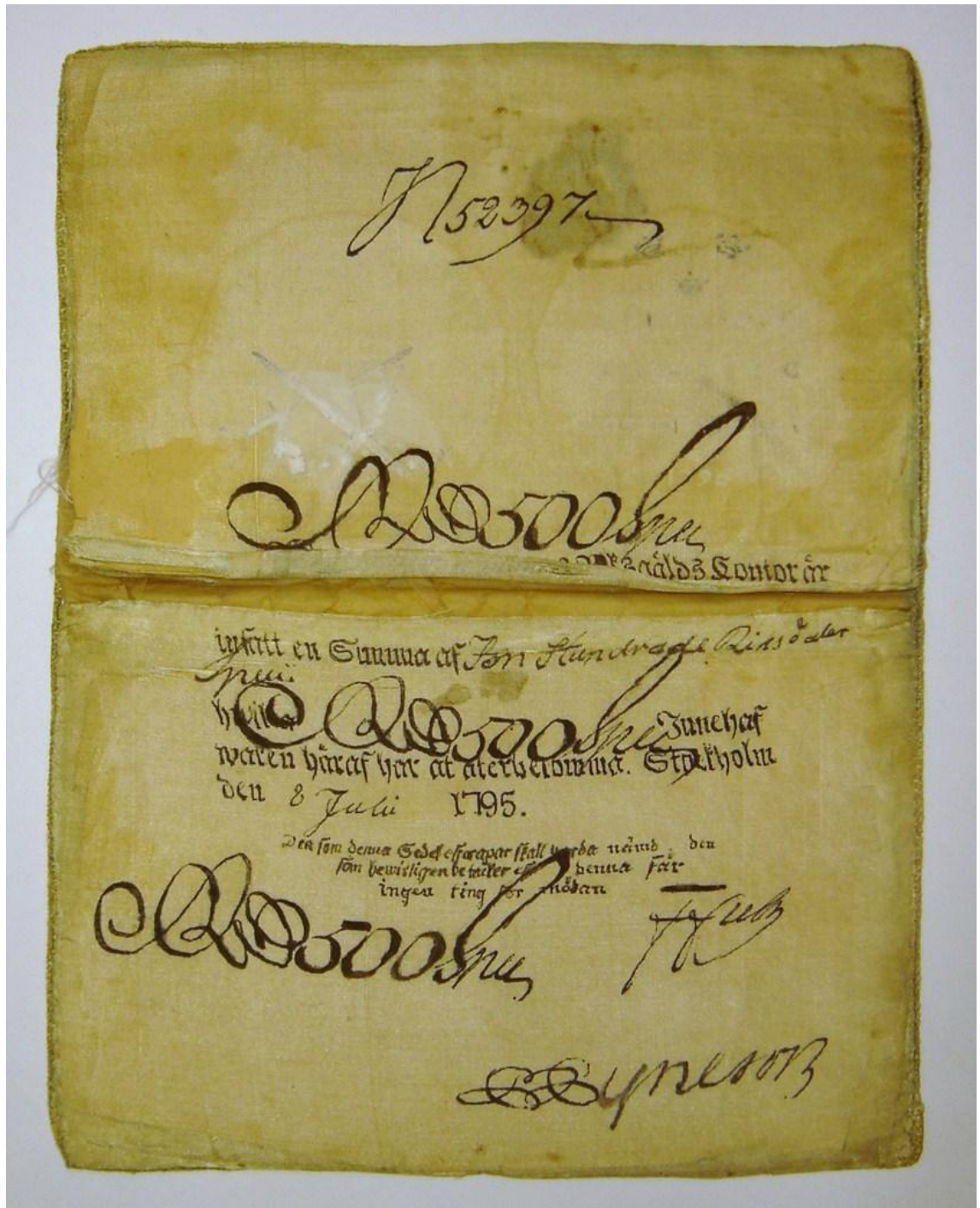


Image 30: Well wishing the happy couple for wealth by decorating the inside of the wallet with a money note. The date of the note could mean the wedding day.

Silk wallet SM 6745, photo by Anu Virtanen

The most notable, unembroidered decoration in wallets, is the bank note made on the inside covers with drawing ink. These wallets contained a different symbol, a wish for a well-filled wallet in a form of a bank note painted inside of them. The habit of painting bank notes to the silk wallets lasted from the late 18th century to the middle

of the 19th century. According to Ernst Nathorst-Böös the notes painted on the silk wallets can be divided in three groups. The first group of notes, Fahnehliemska notes, was named after the chamber counselor Per Georg Fahnehlielm. One explanation for their popularity could be that they were used in money forgery. The second and the biggest group of notes, painted on the silk wallets, were notes that were printed between 1798 and 1824 in the National debt office. The final group of the notes was transport notes. These notes were already used in the 1701 to satisfy the need to pay more easily than with coins.⁸¹ The maker of the banknote decoration usually made some alternations to the banknote, so that they would not directly resemble any specific banknote. This way the giver of the wallet could conceal the person who had signed the note. Sometimes the signature was made with a few unreadable lines, and in some cases the giver wrote his or hers name as the signer of the note. Also the date might have a specific meaning; it could have been dated on Christmas Eve or on the first of April.⁸² But the main, playful idea of these note wallets was that the receiver of the wallet would always have money in it. These note silk wallets were most often given on an event⁸³, such as an engagement present, or perhaps a graduation or a birthday present.

Interpreting these motifs can sometimes be quite challenging. Some of the decoration have contained some symbolic meanings, and reflect many times the receiver(s), and in some cases the relations of the maker and the receiver. Love and affectional feelings had their own symbols as flowers and as items embroidered on All these handmade objects might not have contained a bigger, unspoken meaning. Sometimes they could have just been embroidering made on a fabric just to have some decoration there or perhaps made for practice. We cannot know for sure what were the exact ideas behind every decorations, but looking at this wide selection, we can try to imagine what the makers could have painted on the pocket covers reflecting that the owner would always have money in his or hers wallet. We must also remember that all these handmade object and decorations might not have contained a bigger, unspoken meaning. Sometimes they could have just been embroidering on a fabric just to have some decoration there or perhaps made for practice. We cannot know for sure what were exact ideas behind every decoration but looking at this wide selection, we can try to imagine what the makers could have thought as they were making these, and in what kind of world they were living. The embroideries on the silk wallets tell a story. Even if

⁸¹ Nathorst-Böös 1959, 153-156

⁸² Nathorst-Böös 1959, 156

⁸³ Lehto 1985, 19



Image 30: 1000 RD Specie dated to the 24th of December, as declaring this to have been a Christmas present, wishing the receiver a merry Christmas as well as good fortune. this is the inner decoration of the wallet NMF 1302 (image 20) which had the painted military decoration on the covers.

Silk wallet NMF 1302, photo by Anu Virtanen

they did not contain any unspoken messages they are still their maker's products. They can tell us about their makers and the time they were made. In the 19th century women made the best they could with the resources they had. Some women designed new decoration models and planned their work ahead. None of these silk wallets seem to have been made spontaneously, even if the quality is not as neat and decorative as some other, they still have used time in planning how to make these silk wallets.

3. The makers of the silk wallet

3.1. A gentry woman's life

The silk wallets were made by gentry women. Knowledge in handwork was essential to these women. They were a way to show one's skills and prosperity as well as a respectful way of passing time. The lives of the gentry women were very regulated; they were expected to behave in certain ways, according to their and others rank. The idea of being a lady and a good wife was present at all time. Young girls daily activities were designed to teach them how to become good wives and the elderly ladies were to teach these skills to the younger ones. In addition to silk wallets, another way to get a glimpse inside a gentry mansion is the diary of Jacobina Munsterhjelm. Jacobina Charlotta Munsterhjelm was born on April 16th 1786, in western Nyland in Tavastby. She was the second youngest of nine children. Her father, *söta far*, was captain Anders Gustav Munsterhjelm and her mother, *söta mor*, Ester Sofia Nohström. Jacobina never married, and she lived with her Brother Anders's family the rest of her life.⁸⁴

Through Jacobina's diary, we meet a young girl, who loved her family. Her life was filled with childhood plays, as well as house chores. When there were visitors, she read letter that the family had received to them, to inform what was going on with their relatives and friends. Card games were part of their social events, as well as reading from cards. During Christmas, and on special events for example birthdays and names days, the family would gather together and change presents. And on Christmas, they would go to the church.⁸⁵ In her diary Jacobina observes the daily life of her family and servants, and the changes in the weather and in nature. As the winter turns to spring, she is looking forward to spending more time outside. These observations are from time to time surprisingly accurate compared to some other subjects Jacobina leaves either unmentioned or makes a small remark of something happening around her. During summer, Jacobina liked to spend her time outside, picking berries, playing or working in the garden, but her most favorite summer activity was to go fishing. Jacobina and her sisters went to the fields to see as the workers, their own people, cut rye. If the weather was bad, the evening had come, or during the winter she spent her days inside. She helped in cleaning, sewing and making handwork, and in the kitchen. She had a pet bird which unfortunately passed away one day. This is one of the most personal things she mentions in her diary, from where you can try to understand how she felt. But mostly

⁸⁴ Lönnqvist 19xx, 8-10

⁸⁵ Munsterhjelm 1799, 43, 45, 56-57, 68, 87, 90,

she did not open her own thoughts in the diary. From this point of view, it seems that the meaning of her diary writing was similar to children writing letters, a training tool for learning proper communication and language, but in that case, her mother seems oddly to have no interest, as there were some quite remarkable spelling mistakes.

In the 18th and 19th century diaries and letter were used as a training tool for children to practice the language and the proper use of titles and phrases. These writings were read by the parents, and the letters might have to be re-written before they were able to be sent on. This happened to Jacobina when she writes to Otteliana on the 8th of June 1800, when the letter she first wrote was not good enough, she wrote a new letter which her mother approved.⁸⁶ The received letters were common entertainment and they were read out loud to the family and friends and on occasions, they might have been read to visitors.

The usual skills, which were taught to gentry girls, were writing, reading, languages like France, dancing, playing instruments and of course sewing and embroidering. It is interesting that in her diary Jacobina does not mention studying or teaching. She was only twelve years old, and yet it seems that her parents were not interested in the girl's literary learning, neither does she mention a governess. She knows how to write, though her text is clumsy and full of mistakes and the pages are full of ink stains. This implicates that her mother was only slightly interested by letters, and the members who had travelled or moved to another place wrote regularly to their family at home. Jacobina mentions every time in her diary when they receive a letter. Many people are mentioned in Jacobina's diary, but she does not always mention how they are connected to the Munsterhjelm family. Are they relatives, neighbours, living in the same town or perhaps old friends? Lönnqvist has made a short list in the preface of his work of Jacobina's diary of the people mentioned in there. This gives the reader a small understanding of whom Jacobina is talking about. The similar problem can be found with the silk wallets. Usually there is no information about who has made the silk wallets. The donor is known but maker, and the reason why this particular object was made is in many cases unknown.

Distant relatives and family friends were met in occasional parties and weddings, which also brings change on the ordinary life of the Munsterhjelm. Jacobina describes as people come and go to the parties. Weddings, particularly the preparations, take days. Before the weddings, the bride-to-be stays at the fiancé's home,

⁸⁶ Munsterhjelm 1800, 114

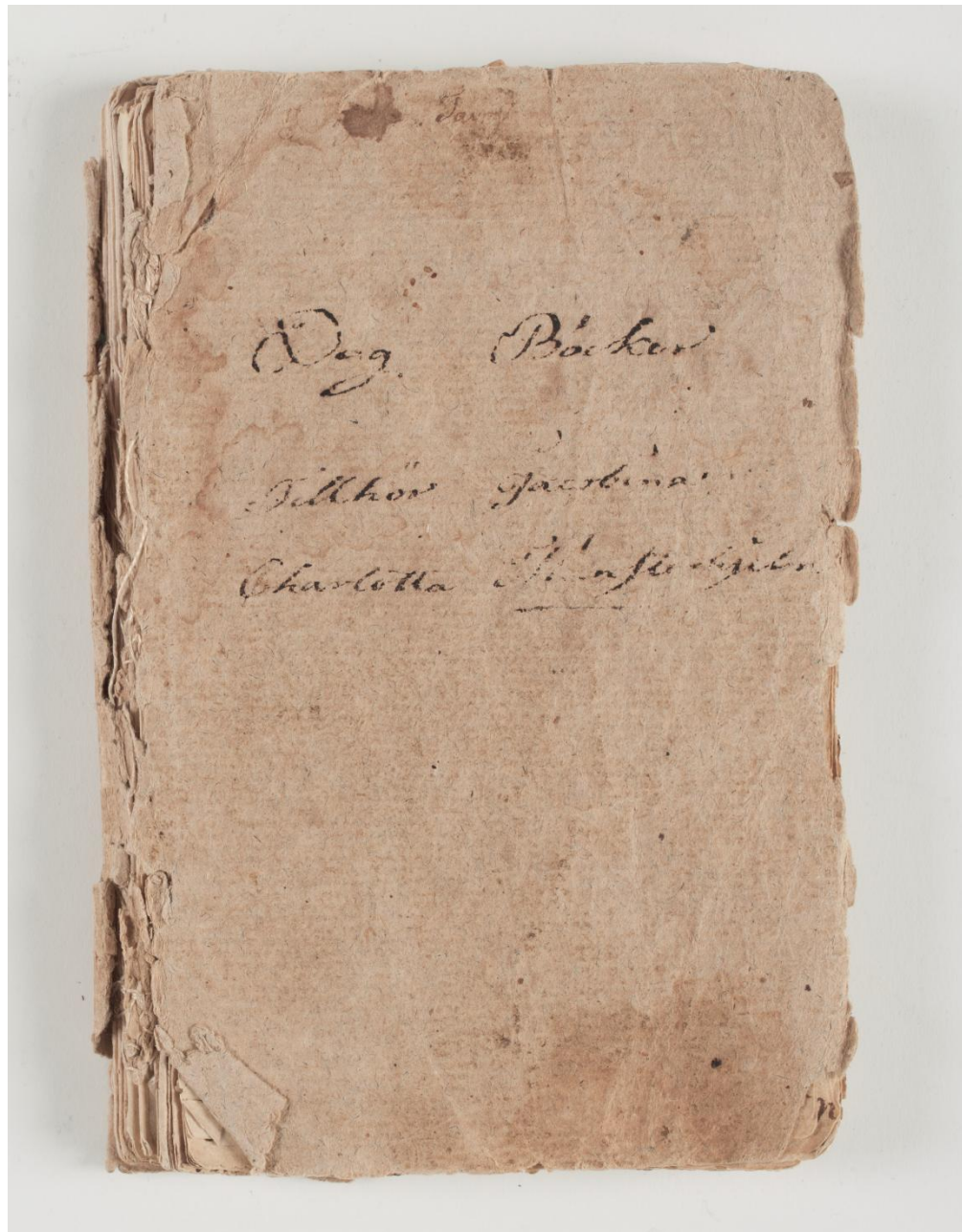


Image 32: The diary of Jacobina Charlotta Munsterhjelm, as can be seen, the diary is in poor shape. Comparing the writing on the cover, to Jacobina's writing (image 34) in her diary, it seems that the cover text is written by someone else.

Jacobina Munsterhjelm's diary, SLS, photo Janne Renvall

and the girls go to a neighbour to borrow a wedding gown. As the bride is getting ready for the wedding, a woman from her vicinity or a family acquaintance performs as a dresser. Jacobina takes part in a couple of weddings during the years she is writing her diary. One of these weddings is her brother's Anders Munterhjelm's to Miss Vendela

Glansenstierna in June 1800.⁸⁷ These festive occasions were a place for the young men and women to socialize. When the women were gathered to stitch a silk bride quilt for the bridal bed, the young men who were part of the bride's vicinity took part of the fun with cheerful chat and banter. They would pull the threads from the needle, fooled the women to make oblique stitches and tried to grasp the hand of their sweetheart under the quilt.⁸⁸

The position of the Munsterhjelm family in the Finnish gentry life is described by Vainio-Korhonen in her work *Sofie Munsterhjelm's aika*⁸⁹ where she points out that the most important meaning of a gentry family in the countryside was to continue the generations as well as maintain the manor culture. Their children were not expected to reach the top of the society but to maintain the family line and the culture.. Marrying Gansensstier Anders Munsterhjel combined his family to the partly high noble society that consisted of the Creutz, Wredes, Glansenstierns, Jägerhorns, Klingspors and the Tandfelts.⁹⁰

Change to the routines and to the daily life of the Munsterhjelm family comes from from weddings, dances and parties, and when Jacobina's grandmother passes in February 1800 and Mamsell Fortelin⁹¹ comes to enfold the body in shroud. But as one life has ended, the family continues to live on, and the sisters gather outside to play and delight themselves in the middle of the grief. The Munsterhjelm family celebrated name days⁹² as well as birthdays. The presents given on these occasions were made by the girls themselves and they are described; for example, the garters Jacobina made so that Lovisa could give them to Beata for her name day, and on her birthday Jacobina got pins from her mother, a rose garland from Hedda, post paper from Beata and Lisa gave her a strawberry garland. Of Christmas presents Jacobina mentions only a couple, the red taft she got from her aunt to make a letter case and the few yards of glossy red

⁸⁷ Munsterhjelm, 37, 41-42, 111-112

⁸⁸ Vainio-Korhonen 2010, 167

⁸⁹ This book handles the life of Sofie Munsterhjelm, the daughter of Anders and Vendela, in the 19th century Finland.

⁹⁰ Vainio-Korhonen 2012, 9-10

⁹¹ Mamsell Fortelin was a family friend of the Munsterhjelm family; she was the god mother of Jacobina, and often visited Tavastebym with Mamsell Alm. At the time elder unmarried women would live by travelling from manor to manor compensating their staying by news and informations.

⁹² Name day is a small scale Nordic celebration which originates from the medieval saints calendar, as a child was named after a saint and on that saint's day the child received congratulations and perhaps small gifts. Every day has its own group of names and during that day children by those names receive small presents and congratulations.

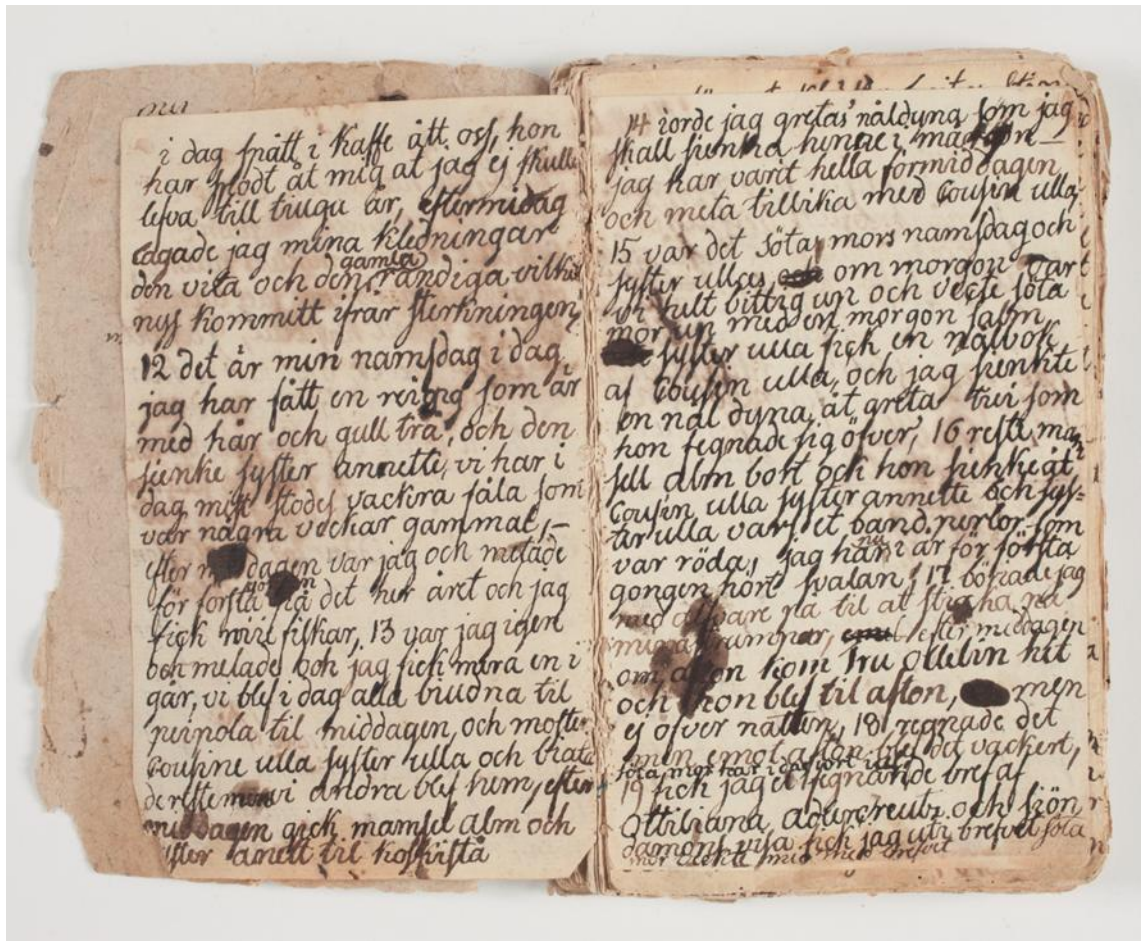


Image 33: Double page of Jacobina's diary, pages 2 and 3

[11 today I twine my sock yarn, Mamsell Alm came again] today for a coffee to our place, she spit out that I would not live till my 20th birthday, in the afternoon I repaired my clothes, the white one and the old striped one which now came from starching, 12th is my names day, today I got a ring, which was made from hair and gold thread, and then sienke sister Anette, we have today lost a beautiful foal which was just a few weeks old, — in the afternoon I was fishing for the first time, and I got nine fish, 13th today I was again fishing. and I got more than the last time, we were all bound up in Peipola for midday, and mother, cousin Ulla, sister Ulla and Biata travelled, but the rest of us stayed home, after noon came mamsell Alm and sister Anett to Koskistå

14 I made Greta's pincushion which I will give her in the morning, — I have been the whole morning and meta together with cousin Ulla, 15th was it sweet mothers name day, as well as sister Ulla's, in the morning we got up early and woke sweet mother up with a morning psalm, sister Ulla got a pin book, and I gave Greta the pincushion som hon fegnade sig ofver, 16th mamsel Alm travelled away, and she sent a band of red beads for cousin Ulla, sister Anette and sister Ulla each, today I have seen/heard a swallow for the first time this year, 17 I started to to knit my sock, after dinner on the evening came fru Ottelin here and she stayed till evening but

not overnight, 18 it reined, but towards the afternoon it became nice, sweet mother had today. 19th I got a letter from Otteliana Adlercreutz and...

SLS, photo Janne Renvall, translation Anu Virtanen

ribbon for her hair from her sister Anette.⁹³ The presents, and the occasions are described generally, but unfortunately, Jacobina does not describe the dresses, even the wedding dresses, or even possible gifts that might have been given before, during and after the wedding. The wardrobe of a young gentry girl contained corsets, different dresses made out of cotton and in different patterns, from which a striped print was mentioned the most often. It seems that Jacobina was not so interested in fashion, the different ways it manifested and the effects it had on her and her family. Or perhaps her diary was not the place to ponder or review these things.

The gentry life was defined by the social ranks. The ways of living and the daily chores were predicted by one's family's position in the society. Growing up in a gentry family meant that the children had to learn proper manners and skills from young age. By making embroideries and other needlework young girls would practice their skills in handwork, and by writing letters they were able to prepare their manners and the proper use of titles and phrases, and from there to be able to act decently in the society as they grew older. Socialization was important among the gentry, particularly in the same social class. To keep up these relationships people would often make visits to neighbours and friends, and to relatives living far away. Different events as weddings, celebrations and funerals, gathered the families and relatives together and made the ties between the gentry and the families stronger. As the communication between distances was limited to letters and gossips, handmade items and gifts was one way of keeping you as part of others lives.

3.2. The everyday handwork of a gentry girl

Handwork was an immense part of a gentry girl's life. The women patched and made new clothes, designed new models and decorated and modernised old clothes and dresses. It was a feminine virtue, to be busy all the time with their hands. The skills came with the years. Except education in conversations, dance, singing, and often in French, the girls would have education in patterning, spinning, carding, weaving and embroidering. Depending on the family's wealth, the daughters, and the women, took

⁹³ Munsterhjelm 1799-1801, 16-17, 56-57, 7-79

part in the daily routines and taking care of the house. Among the nobles and in mansions there was a possibility to create high-quality craft academies in artistic sewing techniques⁹⁴ as the women could concentrate more on their self-development and improving their skills, than in the less wealthy families where the daughters also took part in the house work, cleaning their own rooms or fishing dinner for the family like Jacobina did. Handicraft had a regular position in the daily program of a gentry family. It was a way of socializing and gathered the family together. As the mother sewed and guided her daughters in their needlework, the men usually read and many times the head of the family read out loud to teach the others.⁹⁵ Many gentry girls got their education at home, but some girls were sent to pensions where they would learn reading, writing, dancing, singing and of course sewing and embroidering. In pensions one of the most important subject to study was hand work. With these skills the girls were able to become wives of the house, to secure the attention of possible fiancés as well as provide for themselves and their families in case of need. It is understandable that also silk wallets have been made in pensions. They have been a way to show your own skills.

Jacobina was accustomed in using thread and needle, she made most of her handwork from the beginning and many times she helped her sisters with their handwork. Many times she mentions carding and spinning yarns. One time she makes her self grey silk yarn by carding together black silk and white cotton⁹⁶. Yarn and threads were not the only ways to make decorations or decorations. Jacobina was apparently quite skillful in making hair ornaments, as Otteliana, her friend, sent Jacobina her mother's hair from which Jacobina knit a band for Otteliana⁹⁷. Through her fishing trips in the spring, she had time to spin double and wind sock yarn, patch dresses, knit socks as well as embroider a silk letter case for her aunt. These chores reveal the whole range of the young gentry girl's talents. A good wife could easily do the ordinary patching, molding wool into yarn as well as create decorative embroidery.⁹⁸ And even those women, who no longer needed to sew, were obligated to work as supervisors, to teach children and to guide the servants.⁹⁹ Even in the Gustavian court women were frequently working with their needlework, even though their handicraft did not always become completed.¹⁰⁰

⁹⁴ Wiséhn, 29-30

⁹⁵ Lampinen 1985, 21

⁹⁶ Munsterhjelm 1800, 117, 119

⁹⁷ Munsterhjelm 1799, 47, 52

⁹⁸ Vainio-korhonen 2010, 166

⁹⁹ Lampinen 1985, 4.

¹⁰⁰ Wiséhn 2006, 29.



Image 34: Pages 4 and 5 from Jacobina's diary

In the midday came mamsell Ottelin here and she stayed till afternoon, 20th I started to spin and sew my aunt's letter case, and we also today **lättit så våra puteter**, 21st afternoon it reined quite much, 22nd in the morning, we found Beata's bird lying dead in it's gage, I have today cut birds fat **nippa**, midday came Mrs. Ottelin here and afternoon she went away, today the maids have whipped – 23rd travelled brother Ander to Lovisa, and I ordered from him two styfver and two sheets of paper, 24th it was nice weather, after midday came Närila Hans here and he told that the general Sprängport is in Abborfors, brother Anders came home late and he brought what I had asked, 25th sent sweet mother after Mrs. Ottelin for ensönören and it came till midday 26th we were at Lindholms for a while, Brita Stina came here today for serve sisters clothes for the bride, but sisters gave no answer, 27th went Brita Stina away, in midday was it nice weather but it rained in the afternoon, 28th was it nice weather but cold, I have got today a needle and a darning needle from sweet mother, 29th it was nice weather, and sweet mother and sister Anette and Biata went to Peipola, 30th it was nice weather and then my bird got sick under it's wings, 31st it was still quite sick and sweet mother, cousin Ulla and sisters travelled to Strömfors and Abborfors, sister Ulla and I stayed home, but aunt and grandmother left after noon to Koskistå,

Jacobina Munsterhjelm's diary, SLS, photo Janne Renvall, translation Anu Virtanen

A young girl's capitals were skills in handwork. With a skillful embroidery and handwork one was able to communicate with potential fiancé and prove her skills, talents and wealth. The skillful embroidery was not the only way to prove one's position but also the use of the materials gave a certain message as well as the fact that one was able to make that particular hand work. Making and embroidering a silk wallet or a letter case was time consuming. The maker had to have time to sit down to make this handwork during daylight.¹⁰¹ A skillful handworker was able to combine different skills and create her own decorations and models. She was able to make small details as another, not so skillful girl had to settle with easier models. There is no information what other possibilities a young gentry girl had if she did not manage to sew or embroider. Skills in embroidery were expected from every gentry girl and the practicing started from an early age. In the collection of the National History Museum there are a few silk wallets that are clearly a work of an unskilled girl where as some wallets are of professional quality.

Women started to sew and decorate trousseau¹⁰² well in advance. Sometimes they were not able to get everything done in time, in which case they could have been ordered from a seamstress or a linen shop. A young wife did not have a long break after the wedding when she had to start making and sewing swaddle linen, clothes and bonnets for the new baby. In gentry families the wife had servants that made those chores, or at least most of them so that the lady of the family could concentrate on the embroidery which was needed constantly. Women were in charge of spinning, but also men were interested in embroidery. Some gentry men were even able to embroider linen and silk, sew and knit so skillfully that they could accustom their lady friends to new embroidery models. The fashion was also a combining factor for men and women. Jacobina mentions in her diary, how wonderful it was to hear about the 'new fashion' from the neighbor mansions son who studied. Men usually acted as messengers in these things because they would have the opportunity to travel long distances on school and work affairs.¹⁰³

Girl's skills were tested when she became marriageable. She was supposed to prove her qualities and abilities as a housewife. Before the actual dowry a girl would sew a groom's present for her fiancé which were usually personal items for example in the 18th and the early 19th centuries an embroidered silk wallet, bead embroidered

¹⁰¹ Suominen 2011

¹⁰² Trousseau were clothes and other possessions that a women collected for when she got married.

¹⁰³ Vainio-Korhonen 2010, 166

calling card case in the Biedermeier period or a cross stitch embroidered suspenders. A skilled girl was also able to secure her position with a man who was not able to decide between two potential brides. A maid from Vyborg, Olga Holstius did not hesitate as the object of her affections, a young musician Richard Fatlin travelled to Leipzig for a study trip and to have some time to considerate if he loved Olga or another charming piano student. Olga made a satchel decorated with beads as a farewell present. There is no certain information if this worked, but immediately after his return Richard engaged Olga and they celebrated their weddings in the year 1863.¹⁰⁴

The family connections were important, and this is reflected in the silk wallets. Silk wallets and letter cases were made with care to family members and relatives which were clearly one of the largest groups of receivers. With every silk wallet there is no certain information the relationship of the maker, or the giver and the receiver. But with the information with hand, these silk wallets were made for someone who the maker knew and had some kind of connections with. With only one silk wallet NMF 42066:28, there is a mention of it being professional handwork. The embroidery is detailed, but impersonal, this wallet was made for no-one specific. In few other cases the inner circle of the embroidery is left blank or the initials can be seen unraveled. It seems that these items were also made for sale by the more talented makers or, perhaps, by a professional handworker. It is understandable, that a woman with poor skills in hand work would like to purchase a premade skillfully embroidered hand work if she was not able to make one and had the means to acquire one for herself. And by embroidering the possible initials and the years to the silk wallet she was able to put her own touch on the wallet to make it personalized for the receiver.

*[Maj 1799] 20th I started to spin and sew aunts' letter case... [Detsember Månad 1799] 24th it is the Christmas eve and tomorrow I will take out my **kartuns** dress, and on the afternoon we all got our Christmas presents, I got red taffeta from my aunt for the letter case...*

In Jacobina's diary there are a few mentions referring to making a silk letter case. In these both quotes, Jacobina mentions her aunt, Ulrika Eleanora Aminoff, nee Nohrström, who was part of the family but did not visit much. As the family celebrated every occasion from name day to Christmas, and as Jacobina herself mentions, the silk wallets, or letter cases, were a part of the Munsterhjelm family's gifts and traditions. Jacobina focuses on the daily routines and the possible visits and happenings in their lives, not on the personal issues, on the symbolic meanings of the gentry society nor to

¹⁰⁴ Lehto 1985, 19

the meanings and intentions. And speaking of handwork, it is interesting that Jacobina rarely describes or informs the progress of her handwork. We have no information when she finished the letter case to her aunt. There is no information on what occasion she would have made the letter case for, and to whom the other letter case was meant to be made.

As every woman was able to sew and embroider, handmade items were also given as gifts. In a world where the households were mostly self-sufficient it was understandable to give selfmade gifts. By giving something you made yourself, you were also giving something as a form yourself; you give your time and effort. And you were able to present your skills, thoughts and hopes for the receiver. In making and giving a present, the maker should also know something about the receiver as gifts were made especially for someone. Handwork was a way of keeping the hands busy, and to make gifts was a meaningful way to keep one occupied. Silk wallets were usually made and given as gifts. They were a good way of presenting one's abilities in embroidery as well as including something personal in to the gift. Silk wallets were usually given as grooms presents which the bride made for their future husband ¹⁰⁵, and, in some cases, in hope of an engagement as in Olga's situation mentioned before.

Handwork was a substantial part of a woman's life. The knowledge of handwork as well as other skills for example writing, reading, languages and dance, were acquired at home by the mother, siblings and, if the family was able to afford, from a governess, as well as from aunts and other relatives and friends. In some families, they were able to send their daughters to a girl pension where they would learn these skills from a teacher. These skills were the capital of a gentry girl; through them she was able to present her abilities in becoming a good wife. Every girl was not able to make elaborated embroidery, therefore concentrating on simple models and making them as well as she could was her option, as the experienced handworkers were able to use various methods and models in their work as well as come up with new models. A young woman's skills were tested as she came to the marriageable age; with a skilful handmade needlework she was able to prove to a suitable bachelor how good a wife she would be. These meanings and messages can be found in silk wallets, they were made by someone to someone and in many cases they reflect the relations of the maker and the receiver. Not all silk wallets were made particularly to someone; they were also handwork made for sale by the more experienced and skillful handworker. They were

¹⁰⁵ Silk wallet 2045:19 was made by Barbara Maria Stenius for her fiancé.

commodities in which the buyer was able to add her personal touch, her own hopes and dreams.

3.3. The hopes and dreams embroidered in the silk wallets

The powerful value of affections in textile is one of the combining factor for the textiles preserved in museum, as Marja-Liisa Lampinen writes. This value usually relates to the makers themselves, to the timeperiodf these items were made, to the place where they were made, or to the receiver. Any other group of textiles does not have the same amount of tenderness and care, skill and creativity than the objects and presents made to men; grooms shirts, handkerchiefs, socks and slippers, wallets and tobacco purses.¹⁰⁶ Silk wallets are part of this group, they were made for the men with tenderness and to relatives and friends with care.

These silk wallets have been made mostly as presents. The maker wanted to delight, show her talents and affections to someone, or to honour a relative or a significant acquaintance. The maker has seen an effort in making these items. They contain references to the maker, her desires and ambitions and her skills. Many times they also contain references to the receiver, his or hers profession, trades, characteristics or perhaps initials and the year the wallet was given. A present always tells about its maker and the giver. The gift is always associated with perception of a value, be it monetary or sentimental. A gift might also contain some self-interest from the giver as well as obligations. A gift is usually a case of reciprocity, in rare occasions a present is given without any expectations. As Marcel Mauss writes, a gift is a combination of voluntary and obligation. Nobody is forcing the giver to give a present; she or he makes that decision herself. But usually as you have once received a gift you are obligated for a counter-gift. Neglecting a counter-gift demotes the receiver, especially if the gift has been accepted without a thought or an idea of a substitution.¹⁰⁷ How did it benefit to give a silk wallet as a present, or to receive one? It was a way of recognizing the others rank and status, and to indicate the other's meaning to the giver.

With silk wallet NMF 2045:19 the intentions of the maker are clear. Barbara Maria Stenius (1735-1808) made a silk wallet as a gift to her fiancé, *pitäjän apulainen*¹⁰⁸ in Liminga, Lars Sammal Keckman (1739-1794). The couple was married

¹⁰⁶ Lampinen 1985, 4-5.

¹⁰⁷ Mauss 1999, 112

¹⁰⁸ Originally *pitäjän apulainen* was a permanently employed priest, same rank as chaplain, and the congregation paid his salary.



Image 35: Barbara embroidered her initials using hair to the pocket cover inside of the silk wallet, but unfortunately they have not survived the time. The embroidered rake and scythe refer to her fiancé's profession as pitäjän apulainen.

Silk wallet NMF 2045:19, photo by Anu Virtanen



Image 36: A tulip and a rose bouquet reflect the makers strong love towards the receiver, her fiancé. The delicate forget-me-nots on the sides underline the loving affections.

Silk wallet NMF 2045:19, photo by Anu Virtanen

in the 1760s. The cover has a floral decoration with a flower vine on the edges and a flower bouquet of tulips, carnations and of roses in the middle. To the inside Barbara has embroidered her initial with hair in the middle of an oval flower garland. On the other side there is a scythe, sheaf and a rake crossing each other. The rest of the embroidery have endured the time except the initials made with hair, from where only the outlines are visible. By giving this wallet with her initials to Lars Keckman, Barbara gave herself to him. The wallet seems to say, I am yours, and I am with you.

The patterns in silk wallets have strong symbolic meaning to them. The embroidery could reflect on the receiver's occupation, as in silk wallet NMF 44002:4, which was made for a master tailor Georg Jonathan Öllers. The wallet is made of dark violet atlas silk, the lining is made out of black silk, and the interlining is made of linen. In this wallet, the outside embroidery consists of a yellow rectangular outer circle decorated with colorful flowers, and in the middle of the rectangular there is embroidered an unwieldy flower basket and a cornucopia referring also to fertility as well as good fortune. On the inside of this wallet there is blue-red-yellow rectangular, on the left side there is embroidered tailor's utensils; a meter and a scissors, and on the right side there is embroidered the receiver's initials G.J.Ö. On the inner right side there is the same colourful rectangular, with flower garlands on the sides, and a year 1803 embroidered on it. This wallet has possibly been made for Öllers by his wife, but it clearly contains warm feelings and good wishes to the receiver.



Image 37: On the upper side of the wallet there is embroidered tailor's utensils; a meter and a scissors, and below the receiver's initials G.J.Ö. On the inner right side there is the same colourful rectangular, with flower garlands on the sides, and a year 1803 embroidered on it.



Image 38: A flower basket embroidered as a cover decoration indicates fertility and the importance of reproduction, as the cornucopia reflects good fortune. This wallet has possibly been made for Öllers by his wife, but it clearly contains warm feelings and good wishes to the receiver.

Silk wallet NMF 44002:4, photo by Anu Virtanen

Not all silk wallets were made with romantic affections; a pension girl from Turku embroidered a silk wallet to her brother embroidering his initials on the decoration. The warm feelings toward her brother are shown in the green leaf tied with pink ribbon which decorates the initials. On the cover, there is a sword on a rococo table and on the other side a harp and a flower branch. The sword may indicate that the brother had some sort of a military career.¹⁰⁹ Reference in military career can also be found in silk wallet NMF 1302 (image x) in which the cover decoration is merely of weapons. This silk wallet was made as a Christmas present, which is seen from the date written on the inner decoration. Even though it does not contain romantic symbolism, it still has affection in it, it was handmade to someone. Similar affections can be seen in the silk wallet NMF 4517 which baroness Kothen gave to her husband captain baron Bernt Aminoff¹¹⁰, as a wedding present in 1817. The decoration is delicate and detailed, clearly a work of a talented embroiderer, they have no obvious romantic symbols, but they refer to the receiver. The cover is decorated with a black and white Aminoff family coat of arms, and a drum between two Swedish flags, surrounded by a vine of pink roses. The pockets are decorated with colourful carnations and forget-me-not-flowers surrounding the black and white embroideries of a tree with the initials B. A., and on the other side a pillar covered in clouds with a bow and arrow on top of it. The initials are made with sequin, and the information tells, that the pillar on the pocket embroidery was made from hair. Surprising fact of this wallet is the third decorations layer, a RD Specie worth 90 000 painted inside of the wallet.¹¹¹ Not only is it surprising to find a third decoration, the interesting fact is, that the note is dated on the Christmas eve, 24th of December 1801. Could this be the year they had met? This wallet refers mainly to Bernt Aminoff with his initials and by his coat of arms, from this it would make sense that the year on the note could mark to an important day of his life. Baroness Kothen has made this silk wallet specifically to her husband - her affections toward him are there. She has spent hours in making and embroidering this wallet, just like many others making silk wallets, or other embroidered gifts to their loved ones. Spending so much time and effort in making a silk wallet it cannot be an unimportant item.

¹⁰⁹ Silk wallet 1746:1a

¹¹⁰ It is a possibility, that Bernt Anders Aminoff was Jacobina's cousin from her mother's side; sötä mors sister Ulrika Eleonora Aminoff, nee Nohrström (mentioned before), had a son Bernt Anders Aminoff - *Kusinerna Aminoff* – as Jacobina mentions in her diary. Both of these B. Aminoffs mentioned were captains and they lived at the same time. The only mystery is the baroness Kothen mentioned in the silk wallet NMF 4517 object card. Cousin Aminoff's wife was Hedvig Lovisa Aminoff to whom he married in the first decade of the 19th century. The silk wallet NMF 4517 was made – by the information of the donor – in 1817. Could it have been a wedding day present?

¹¹¹ Silk wallet 4517



Image 39: In 1817, baroness Kothen gave a silk wallet to her husband captain baron Bernt Aminoff, as a wedding present. The cover is decorated with a black and white Aminoff family coat of arms, and a drum between two Swedish flags, surrounded by a vine of pink roses, as the only clear romantic element on the cover decoration.

Silk wallet NMF 4517, photo by Anu Virtanen



Image 40: Compared to the outer decorations, the pocket embroidery clearly has a romantic symbolism with the forget-me-nots and pink carnations, and with the arrow and the bow above the pillar. The tree could refer to the tree of life, and with the initials B. A. embroidered under it, this wallet seems to have been made with love and care. Surprisingly, this wallet has a third layer of decoration, as the inside of the pockets, there is a note worth of 90 000 RD Specie drawn in there.

Silk wallet NMF 4517, photo by Anu Virtanen

By decorating the silk wallets with text, the maker was able to emphasize the embroidery. On the other side of two doves a young gentry girl embroidered a note book in which she wrote “*So vi oss alla önt förena vi livågda glada där*” ¹¹². This silk wallet seems to have been made for an engagement present or a wedding present. As the girls living in pensions were young, and the outcome is quite clumsy, this was probably made as a gift to a couple. Similar wishes are found on another silk wallet containing rhymes as decoration; on the pockets covers of the silk wallet NMF 4987:11 there are two rhymes which both refer to friendship and the bliss one gets from it.

En vänskap med beftändighet; den varas i alla evighet

Det lifvets sällhet är att ät en älskad vän; sin hela änket ge ock älskad bli igen

This silk wallet seems to have been unfinished, it is missing the inner lining as well part of the decoration has been unraveled, a vestige of initials CB can be seen on the silk.



Image 41: Among images, the silk wallets were also decorated with small rhymes and notes. This silk wallet could have been an engagement or a wedding present, to which the symbols of love - two doves and an arrow - emphasized by the note “If all would unite us, we would enjoy the life more” refer. The covers of this wallet are embroidered with the same decorations as silk wallet NMF 1746:1b, image x.

Silk wallet NMF 1746:1c, photo Anu Virtanen

¹¹² NMF 1746:1c, *If all would unite us, we would enjoy the life more*, translation Anu Virtanen



Image 42: As mentioned before, some silk wallets were never finished, one of them is silk wallet NMF 4987:11, which contains two rhymes, both referring to friendship and the bliss one gets from it.

En vänskap med beständighet; den varas i alla evighet

Det lifvets sällhet är att äta en älskad vän; sin hela ömhet ge och älskad bli igen

Silk wallet NMF 4987:11

In some wallets the thoughts and the messages are clear and open to anyone; in silk wallet NMF 4858:4, the message is there written on the cover - a loving gift. The text is embroidered with gold string in Russian. The maker said out loud what she meant. A small envelope shaped silk wallet made from violet silk and decorated with golden embroidery of a flower garland and a quiver, which refers to Cupid as he brought love with his quiver. Sometimes it does not need more, just an image and a few words telling clearly what the maker had felt.

In the 17th and the 18th centuries, the language of flowers was developed. The number of certain flowers had their own meanings; for example one flower meant that you are everything to me, I love you. Two flowers intended that the giver wanted to meet the receiver again, three flowers indicated that the giver wanted some alone time with the person he gave them to. As flowers in the silk wallet embroidery, many times there is one bigger flower which is accompanied by smaller flowers - this could point to the feelings of the maker. In many case flower is a rose or a tulip, which both mean romantic love, a red rose true love and a red tulip undying love. The same meaning can be found with red carnations, which are embroidered on silk wallet NMF 4517 (images 69 and 70), most of the embroidery is black and white and it refers to the receiver, but the affections of the maker is in the colorful forget-me-not vine and carnations surrounding the inner decorations.

Silk wallets are filled with meanings; they represent the hopes of the maker, her wishes to the receiver as well as an illustration of the person receiving the silk wallet and of the surrounding world. Silk wallets were in many cases made as a gift. Giving a gift is voluntary, and not always the giver expects to get anything in return. Silk wallets were made and given both in order to make something personal to the person receiving the present, as well as counter present to someone who had remembered you in the past. The reasons of making and giving a silk wallet vary from remembering important persons and to emphasizing their lives, to illustrating romantic love as well as affectionate love among friends and siblings. During the time of the silk wallets, communicating with flowers was popular; declaring your love by embroidering red roses, tulips and carnations. The symbolism was strong, it was everywhere and it was used in the daily life and through these symbols one was able to communicate without words.



Images 43-44: 'A loving gift', the maker of this wallet did not hide her feelings, as she embroidered them on the cover of the wallet. The quiver embroidered on the other side supports the idea of a romantic gift.

The National History Museum of Finland, silk wallet 4858:4, photo by Anu Virtanen



4. Conclusion

Delicate and embroidered decorations, this is one of the first impressions one might have looking at silk wallets. At a first glance, with no further information, it is hard to tell what they were, how they were used and why they were made. The understanding of these items is not easy, if one does not have further information of them and their context. This is one of the reasons why this thesis was made; to find out, what these items were, from where these beautiful items were evolved and why. And of course, who made them? These items were made by someone, they were made for a reason, and the decorations contain symbolism and hidden thoughts and hopes of the maker. They are, in a way, part of their maker, the women who made them. This thesis is trying to reveal what silk wallets were, how they were made and what symbolism and unspoken words can be found in their decorations - and from there to understand part of the gentry woman's life in the 18th and 19th century Finland. These silk wallets are a one way of looking at the past culture; they are the products of that particular time and culture, and the women living then. Living in a different century, and trying to understand what these items had been, and what they could tell us about the gentry women making them, it is not easy to understand every message in the wallets. As for the primary material, I have viewed around one hundred silk wallets from the collections of the National Museum of Finland and the Satakunta Museum. My aim was to familiarize myself with a large group of these items as they differ from each other by the materials and from the decorations. Every silk wallet seems to be unique. The idea was to see, and to get familiar to a large group of these items, as all wallets vary from each other in decorations, colours and the embroidery methods.

Silk wallets were developed around the same time as the paper notes became in use. Before paper notes, metal in different shapes, as coins or copper plates, was used as payment, but with large sums it became easier to use paper money. A wallet made out of leather or other durable fabric was commonly used. But the silk wallets, they were mostly made and used among the gentry, where they would have the materials and the time to make these items. Silk wallets and letter cases were made in the Northern Europe, for example in Great Britain to preserve mementos and notes, But in the Southern Europe this kind of tradition seems to have been unknown as in Portugal there were no signs or knowledge of this kind of silk wallets and letter cases. The silk wallet tradition studied here, was particularly a Swedish-Finnish phenomenon. In England the

similar tradition as silk wallets originated from pocket books, transformed to letter cases. These letter cases are similar to some silk wallet models studied here, but mostly they have the similar structure as the silk wallets in Portugal; a simple envelope or flapped wallet decorated with coloured silk and metal threads. The English letter cases also contain a division between the two extending and folding back as scalloped flap over the compartments. The Swedish-Finnish silk wallet does not contain any scalloped flaps separating them from their English models. It is interesting to find out, that the silk wallet tradition had its own designs and styles in different countries; the local cultures gave their own flavour to these items.

The silk wallets seem to have been made for more festive situations and not for everyday use. This is understandable as silk is a very delicate material and was affected by the luxury code. Despite of the delicate material these items were used. Some silk wallets seem to have been used as preserving mementoes and perhaps hidden in drawers, like the silk wallet NMF 2629:4 from which they found a note containing childish scribble on it. Few silk wallets, as the silk wallet NMF 42006:28, seem to have been un-used for some reason; perhaps it was made for sale as the embroidery is done quite professionally but the decoration seem to have missing the personal motifs. There are also silk wallets which clearly have been used, which does not seem to have been preserved in drawers; one example is the silk wallet NMF 7336, which is today preserved in sheer fabric which keeps the wallet from falling apart. Another example of an used silk wallet is SM 3869, a patchwork quilt made silk wallet where the silk is strained and dirty and parts of the decorations are worn out.

Knowledge in craft was self-evident for women in all classes and average households were self-sufficient concerning textiles. Sewing, darning and patching were part of the everyday life, and handmade items were a display of skills. Elaborate handy pieces were part of a gentry woman's daily tasks as she would have time to make delicate embroidery. The most important sewing equipment was a needle. Cross-stitching demanded a needle with a round point, where as fine embroidery a very thin needle was used. A woman could possess multiple needles for different uses which were secured in a needle book or a case. And a well-equipped pincushion was considered as a status object. To ease embroidering, one could use a sewing frame, on which the fabric was stretched on in order to keep the fabric tight. In any sewing a woman needed a thimble, or a sewing ring, which helped to push the needle through the fabric.

There are various decoration methods used in silk wallets which were common in the 18th and 19th century handwork. Many of these decorations were practiced on

samplers as the young girls rehearsed for future embroideries. The images and motifs were copied from other embroideries as well as premade models. The embroidery on silk wallets was largely made with colourful silk or metal threads. To make the decorations more personal, the maker could use her, or the receivers, hair in the decoration. Using your own hair, But also other means were used as painting and printing, and writing can be found on the silk wallet decorations as in silk wallets NMF 1302 and NMF 541007. As there are proof that both of these methods were used, it is interesting that in silk wallet decoration these two methods are not used together. The decorations vary on the outside and inside covers. The most popular patterns used in the embroidery are different floral motifs. Not all decorations were flowers; in some cases vivid scenery decorates a silk wallet such as the hunting scene in silk wallet NMF 58092:1 and the landscape scenery in silk wallet NMF 8293:2. The message and the idea of the embroidery could be emphasized by adding notes and verses on the decorations which usually contained a message of the blissfulness of a friendship. Writing happy wishes were a way of expressing your wishes for the receiver. To dedicate the silk wallet to someone was possible by embroidering initials as part of the decoration. Silk wallets were made and given as presents, there could be a couples initials in the decorations and it could be either an engagement present or a wedding gift. These silk wallets were not made for whomever, but for someone specifically. Making these items took time and effort, as well as materials, thus they were not made for the pleasure of making something. One of the noticeable pocket cover decoration is the bank note painted, or written with marker. These notes had a humoristic idea behind them as the receiver would always have money in their wallet. This tradition of a banks note in silk wallet decoration is exclusively a Swedish-Finnish phenomenon, as they are not found in silk wallets made in other countries.

Decorations embroidered in silk wallets contain symbolic meanings. During the 18th and 19th centuries the communication was quite different from today - symbolism in handwork was frequently used and they were generally known. Floral motifs were popular in the 18th and the 19th centuries and they can be found almost in every silk wallet. Various floral motifs circle the center motifs, and many central decorations contain flowers in them. Roses and forget-me-nots, which refer to true love, were the most popular flowers used in embroideries. Other recognizable flowers are cloves, carnations, tulips, cherry blossoms, bachelor buttons and moon flowers, in these too, the symbolism refer to different levels of love and affections. Other natural motifs used in silk wallet embroideries are palm leaves as well as wheat which both illustrate

similar ideas; the palm leaf victory and success where the wheat refer to wealth and success. There is some information of what the images on the embroidered decorations meant; good fortune was symbolized by cornucopia and flower baskets and the tree of life illustrated fertility. Love, one of the most expressed motifs had its illustrations in hearts and doves, and Cupid, the god of love, is illustrated by his armory - in bows, arrows and vines. The receiver was also tied on the decoration; various weapons and flags reflect to a military career, and meter and a tailor's scissors to a tailor. Sentimental value is one of the most common reasons why items have been reserved. Some of these silk wallets contain the hopes and desires of young girls and women. In them, the maker is signaling her dreams of the future, of love and happiness, and, in some cases, of success. Every decoration does not contain a personal message; in few cases there is only decorative embroidery made to embellish the silk wallet. But more often the decorations were symbols of the maker's wishes and thoughts. This means, that the people at that time would have to know the language of the decorations, and the objects used in them, as well as the skills to make them to be respectable. One of the most notable decoration group on the silk wallets were the bank notes which were usually painted on the inside covers with drawing ink, in one case the note was painted inside the pockets creating a third decoration level on that silk wallet. This habit lasted from the late 18th century to the middle of the 19th century. The playful idea of painting a bank note in a silk wallet, was to that the receiver would always have money in his or hers wallet. These silk wallets were often given on an event, such as engagement or wedding presents, or as a birthday gifts.

Handwork was an important part of a young gentry girl's life. By learning to make decorative and beautiful embroidery she was able to show her skills to the other sex, and to present her abilities as a possible wife and a home maker. The handworks contained unspoken messages. What if one was not able to make lavish embroidery? Could this have affected how your handwork was interpreted? A gentry woman was expected to know how to sew and make embroidery. A young girl was expected to get married; it was one of the only ways to preserve one's future. There are still cases where a woman has managed with her own skills to create a good life and to become self-sufficient without the comforts of a marriage. But usually unmarried gentry women become a burden to their families, or they would spend their lives travelling from house to house as company ladies.

Sewing and making handwork took a long time, as everything was made by hands. The light affected how much you were able to make. During the day you had the

advantage of the day light, as in the nights the only light source was the fireplace or a candle, which were rarely used. Sewing machine became common in the late 19th century at the same time as the electric light. These two changes in the house affected on the way people made hand works, as well as their possibilities on working during the evenings. Sewing machines have also affected on the result of the hand work, even a person who were not so talented were able to produce a good outcome with the machine. This must have affected on the messages in hand works. Interestingly around the same time, the culture of silk wallets started to fade and in the early 20th century there were only a few silk wallets mentioned having been made. As the culture of the handwork and embroidery started to change, so did the outcomes and the meanings.

The parents were in charge of a young girls learning, and she would learn sewing and embroidering from her mother and siblings. And if the family could afford it, they could send their daughters in pensions, where they would learn writing, reading, languages for example France and dancing in addition to various handworks. The education of a young gentry girl aimed to prepare her to becoming a good wife and the heart and soul of the home. It was important that she knew how to maintain the house, make handwork, read and write, as she would keep contact to relatives and friends. With Jacobina Munsterhjelm it is interesting, that her parents did not seem to have been interested in her learning, or could it be, that they did not have the necessary skills for this? As she has several brothers, it could have been, that the Munsterhjelm's concentrated on the boys education, teaching only handwork and the basics of writing to the girls, as Jacobina had her own diary and by the notes in there, it is obvious that various handwork were part of her life from the early age. Remained diaries and letters give us a direct view to the lives in the past. Children would use letters and diaries to practice their skills. But with Jacobina, it seems that she had the diary as her own pleasure, to where she marked daily incidents and the changes in the weather.

Handwork were an active part of Jacobina's life which can be seen from her notes; many times she mentions carding and spinning yarns, she patches her dresses and makes presents for her family as well as friends. In the first pages of her diary Jacobina mentions starting to work on a silk letter case for her aunt, but unfortunately she does not write about the progress of the wallet or when she gives it to her aunt, and in another entry getting the materials for a silk letter case not continuing with this subject later on. A silk wallet made to an aunt, could contain decoration with flowers, perhaps an image of a daily event, or wishes for the aunts future. A quote reflecting friendship and the bliss of life among friends relates the warm feelings of the maker. Made for a fiancé or a

husband, the decorations had more obvious symbolism, hearts, doves, bows and arrows as well as vines referring to the maker's love and affections toward the receiver. And by embroidering her initials to the silk wallet, the maker could give herself to him, to be with him as he would carry the wallet with him. Loving gift, it is also simple and clear to embroider the text as such to the decoration.

The decorations on the wallets tell a story. Some stories are more visible than others, as the silk wallet NMF 2045:19 made with love by Barbara Maria Stenius to her fiancé Lars Sammal Keckman. The decorations on this silk wallet contain floral motifs with roses, tulips and carnations as reflections of her loving feelings toward her fiancé. And by embroidering their initials to the pocket covers she embroidered part of herself there as saying I am yours and I am with you. The embroidery on silk wallet NMF 4858:8 says it openly as the words *a loving gift* is embroidered in the cover. Even if the embroidery would not contain a clear symbolism or a message from the maker they are still made by someone. The abilities of the maker, her way of constructing a silk wallet and its decorations are represented in these items. A person makes what she can, many times we learn new patterns and techniques, and design our work ahead. None of the silk wallets seem to have been made spontaneously. The decorations have taken time in planning and in embroidering them. The messages these items have contained have clearly been important. They have been a way to communicate, and as the changes in the ways of communication, as well as changes in handwork, the silk wallets have become unnecessary. During the 19th century there were many changes which affected the gentry's culture as well as the culture of handworks, the arrival of sewing machines, the changes in the education system as well as in the social classes, which all can be seen affecting even the tradition of silk wallets. Silk wallets were a product of the 18th and 19th centuries. And with the changes in the society they changed from meaningful items to insignificant items. One did not need to embroider decorative silk wallets to another as to present one's skills and abilities. There became another ways to communicate. Embroidering silk wallets was one form of presenting the maker's feelings and hopes, to present the receivers position and rank, and of course to make something personal to someone.

This change would be an interesting subject to study. How did the ways in communicating through objects changed? What are the meanings hidden in objects? Were there some private messages in the decorations? What is seen by the popular eye and what is hidden only to be seen by the owner? Where were the lines between the public and personal communication? With this, I raise an interesting question about the

line between public and private. The silk wallet itself seems to have been a public item, as it was decorated with outside of the wallet is detailed embroidery filled with hopes and dreams of the maker, and they might have included some humoristic messages. But the items that were kept inside the wallets seem to have been private memorabilia's of the owner or some other items filled with different meanings. These items, as well as many other items we possess, contain both the public and private sphere, through which we communicate. These silk wallets were items which seem to have been located in both of those spheres; they were a way of presenting one's abilities and skills as well as present the makers feelings toward the receiver. This does not exclude the possibility of hidden feelings and private messages that the maker wanted to express only to the receiver. But silk wallets were also used to contain something private, the important mementos of the owner. To interpret these lines in silk wallets, in ladies bags or other object groups in general, to be able to do that, to find the clues and to be able understand them, would take more time and effort than was possible in this work.

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